

Chapter 26: Business Development

When I woke up, it felt like only a few minutes had passed since I fell unconscious. Claire was focused on the medical terminal while Thorne was still standing there in the same spot facing me. He quickly noticed me and tapped Claire on the shoulder.

“You’re awake! How are you feeling?”

I sat myself up, “Like every morning, tired. How long was I out for?”

“Just a bit over an hour!” Claire exclaimed.

That wasn’t too much longer than expected...Looking over the logs on the terminal, everything almost went smoothly. Claire only needed to make some minor adjustments, and she did well.

“Isn’t it almost morning? Let’s all go get some rest.” I stood up and stretched. The area around where I was shot felt a little sore, but should be fine in a few days.

“Umm, is it okay to do so? Those guys that shot you are still looking for you, right? They must suspect it was retaliation for the clinic attack,” Thorne awkwardly stated.

“Should be fine. From what I learned, the only people who targeted us are already dead. The rest of the whatever you call that gang shouldn’t know about us, but we should keep our guard up for the time being anyway.”

“You mean the Rust Scrapers... they’re a pretty big gang, so I guess it makes sense that they aren’t too centralized,” Thorne muttered.

“Right, Rust Scrapers...maybe it’s time for us to hasten our plan to recruit more people. A security team sounds like something we could use, a receptionist and another surgeon or two too, but I’ll need to get a license for the clinic first to hire any proper medical professionals...”

Claire hesitated for a moment before clearing her throat, drawing our attention, “About that... I think I want to learn about Chrome as well. That was pretty cool what I just did.” She smiled toward the medical terminal attached to the operating table.

“I thought you were learning about cybersecurity? Are you switching over or are you planning on juggling both?” I raised an eyebrow.

“I’ll do both! Come on, don’t look at me like that. There’s a limit to how long I can throw myself on one subject until my brain explodes!” Claire exclaimed. “Oh, and can we look into getting those fancy SAID models that have the sleep learning feature? That would make me learn a lot faster!”

“...Hypnopedia models shouldn’t be an issue, but the cassettes with the relevant knowledge on them aren’t cheap and only Social Corp sell them as far as I know. And they aren’t sold to just anyone.”

With six points in cybernetics engineering, I can probably design a working hypnopedia model, but the way the so-called cassettes inject knowledge into the brain in a safe and effective fashion was beyond me. I will need more points in software and even then, I will still have to do a lot of testing on live subjects, so that isn't really an option.

"Tsk, okay, I'll study the old-fashioned way..."

"You also were going to do the interviewing right?" Thorne ruthlessly delivered another blow.

"...Yeah, I'll manage..."

There was a flood of ads whenever I tried to watch any videos online. I could command my optics to shut it off while it played, but the interruption made me want to stop watching entirely.

Sitting in a chair inside an empty office lobby area, I spotted the distracted receptionist busy with whatever was playing on her cybernetic eyes. I got up and stretched when the nearby door opened.

"Mr. Halls I presume?" I shook the man's outstretched hand. "That's right."

"Nice to meet you. I am Garcia Torres. We spoke on the phone."

"Right, pleasure as well, Mr. Torres."

"Please, call me Garcia." I nodded amiably, and he continued, "About what we previously discussed, preparations are complete. Once you have the funds transferred over, we can go ahead to the examination room."

My SAID wired over the funds and I proceeded to follow Garcia out of the office into the maze-like hallways of the campus. We passed by crowds of students either rushing about their classes or simply socializing around the hallways.

We took an elevator to a more secluded floor and passed through a security check you would typically see at concerts or sports games in my previous world.

Crossing through a large open area, we entered a small classroom, with a couple dozen one-person desks and a terminal attached to each one.

"Well, Mr. Halls, feel free to pick any seat here and we can begin. If you need anything, please notify me or any of the other proctors that may periodically replace me." Garcia sat down at the front of the room and his eyes then took on an unnatural glow.

I picked a random seat and before long, a woman entered and tapped her security card on the terminal in front of me.

The console unlocked and I found several test subjects to choose from. Not wanting to worry about remembering which ones I had completed, I started from the top.

After a long and grueling amount of time, I was finally done, but it wasn't entirely over yet. Next, they led me to an adjacent room where there were several stations with a person manning each of them. I had to diagnose or perform specific procedures to get a passing grade for each one.

Though tedious, thanks to my experience at the clinic and the knowledge from the system, I breeze through everything without being stumped.

Despite my results, there weren't scholarships or anything to soften the blow on my wallet though...

After spending a whole day and a whole lot of credits, I returned to my clinic with a new medical degree. The clinic was closed today, so it was not surprising I didn't find Claire in the lobby. As I walked toward my workshop, I heard some noises in the break room, luring me in to investigate.

"---you for your time today. We'll contact you as soon as we have made a decision." I watched as Claire shook hands with an older woman.

They noticed me as the woman was gathering her things. She smiled and nodded at me as she walked by and I returned the gesture as I watched her close the door behind herself.

"Interview? How'd it go?"

"Super tedious. I need something sweet after this. Wanna order ice cream or something?"

"Sure, get me the same milkshake as usual then," I replied and took a seat next to her. I stole a glance at the profiles displayed on her terminal. "Any interesting candidates?"

"What do you qualify as interesting? They were all qualified for the position they applied for on paper. I didn't ask for their life story, but I got the basic gist of it from their education, work history, and from speaking with them."

"Well, okay. I left you to handle it, so you do that."

"...How about you? Everything went okay?"

I sent her a copy of my new credentials, "Yep, it was expensive and tedious and I still have to spend another boatload of credits for a forged residency record."

"You can do that? So it's that easy to get certified... That's a scary thought."

"I doubt the doctors you've seen had bribed their way through to get their medical licenses. Any corporation or medical facility could figure it out with a little digging during the hiring process. People only usually bribe their way to a license to just brag or collect it like trophies."

People who bribed their way through wouldn't be hired unless their employers were oblivious to a ridiculous degree. They could start their own practice like I was doing, though.

"I see...anyway, let's pick up where we left off yesterday in our lesson! I can't handle staring at people's resumes any longer."

"Okay, sure." I could spare some time before resuming my project at the workshop.

As I pulled up to the parking lot, I received a call.

"Thorne, can you get some food for us when you guys come back?" Claire instantly blared out.

"Sure, the usual?"

"Yeah, gotta go now. See you."

"All right everyone, let's go." I spoke to the rest of the car and started making my way into the enormous low-rise we parked in front of.

I spared a glance back at the four other people lagging behind before walking up to the reception.

"Hi, I made a reservation for Thorne."

"Yes, we are expecting you, sir. Please sign here."

Once the paperwork was complete, they took us to a locker room to get changed. I grimaced as I noticed we were a rag-tag group that wore different equipment, with no uniformity whatsoever.

We then went into a lobby area before a set of metal doors with a terminal beside it. The door opened once I keyed in the specification into the terminal. Inside was a tactical training facility that made extensive use of projection technology that allowed you to quickly customize the course.

Though instead of training how to assault a facility, we were doing the opposite, focusing on defensive tactics, as that was the job they were hired for as guards.

"Get ready. Training begins as soon as we step inside."

The numbers on my account grew smaller and smaller. I still had a decent income from the clinic, but the expenditure was greater than the income. I was on the last few crates of cybernetics I had available for sale too, so I had to find a new supplier.

The harvesters in my district went to the ground recently, so I switched to targeting other scums and expanded my area of operation to other districts. I tried not to target any one group in particular, which resulted in my experience gain slowing down as I had to pick my mark.

I opened my status as I sat in waiting.

Status	
Level:	10
EXP:	270/1000
Musculoskeletal:	51
Neural Reflex:	15
Visuomotor Coordination:	12
Endurance:	24
Sensory Perception:	52
Upgrade Points:	0
Upgrades:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Stealth +7● Hacking +3● Cybernetic Engineering +6● Stealth Technology +5● Software Engineering +3
Enhancements:	SAID: Zenitech Hoth Mk.3 Optics: Nova Tech Stars Mk.4 Cyberarm (Left): Nova Tech Mudra Mk.6 Auditory: Amazing Corp FieldTac Gen 2 Cardiovascular: BioGen Labs Marathon 4

After the previous incident, I went ahead and installed a combat-rated auditory implant and an implant for cardio. As a result, my sensory perception and endurance went up.

The cardiovascular implant I got was like a pacemaker, but housed nanomachines instead, which enhanced my stamina. I was a little too hesitant to replace an entire organ as important

as my heart with an entirely cybernetic one, not with my budget at least, so I opted for this one. For the same reason, I opted to shelve the idea of getting cybernetics that improved my visuomotor coordination and neural reflexes. After all, the brain wasn't to be casually messed around with.

"Thank you for waiting, Mr. Halls. We are ready to receive you now. Please follow me." A man's voice drew me from the status screen.

"Yes, of course." I got up, buttoned my suit, and followed the man into a room that was reminiscent of a small courtroom. I took a seat in the middle while a panel of three sat where the judges would sit, looking down at me.

The man who led me took a seat amongst the panel before he continued, "Well, we have reviewed your documents and completed your background check. We believe we have enough information on hand based on your evaluations and requirements to be able to skip the tedious interview process and grant you your Cybernetic Surgeon License. Congratulations, you are now officially recognized as a licensed medical professional in the field of cybernetics."

Well, I might've spent a lot on the bribes, but at least I got what I paid for. I listened to each member of the panel recite some iteration of congratulations and excitement for embarking on a new journey in my life.

"---We look forward to seeing the positive impact you'll make with your practice."

Great, with my license finally obtained, my clinic can now operate legitimately, meaning I could get proper supplier channels that aren't as over-priced, and hire professionals to increase the number of surgeons so I won't be the only one at the clinic.

Being over the moon, I immediately set out to purchase my favorite milkshake before I made some calls with some cybernetic suppliers. I then sent a message to Claire, asking her to start hiring cybernetic surgeons and the bureaucratic processes to legitimize the clinic.

Having pushed all my bureaucratic responsibilities to Claire and her team of clerks we hired, I couldn't wait to finish the latest creation that I had been cooking up in my workshop.

'Time is money', If only I can buy more time, it feels like I never have enough of it.