

## Chapter 27: Starting Production

“Okay, deploy the security team,” I called out to Thorne, who was beside me with the new security guards we hired behind him.

“Okay, you guys, set up position,” He watched the team file through the door. A minute or so later, he nodded at me. “They’re in position now.”

I issued a command for my SAID to double-check my new implant to ensure the settings were all correct.

“Sounds good. I’m heading in now. No need to notify them.”

Passing by the metal doors, I made sure to move as stealthily as I could and made my way toward the center of the room, where a small house was. It looked quite real, and I wouldn’t have doubted it if I didn’t know projection technology was at play beforehand.

*I wonder what the actual material is beneath the projections.*

Moving in, I soon found the security guys all set up in one room, carefully guarding the only entrance and window.

A quick command through my SAID booted up my new implant. I watched as my hands blurred from view until I could no longer see it. My limbs and body were now see-through. I unholstered my pistol by feeling alone, as the active camouflage prevented me from seeing the weapon at all.

I switched to thermal on my optics and was able to see the outlines of my limbs again. I knew it was possible to create a version that could mask my heat and IR signature, and other detection methods like through the surrounding airflow as well, but it would cost more points into stealth tech, time, and money for the materials. They also weren’t suitable for mass production for the same reason.

The doors and window were opened for this exercise since they knew I was coming. Their attention was glued to the two entry points. While the instincts from the stealth skill screamed at me to only move in their blind spots during a lapse in their attention, I slowly strode into the room.

Walking around them, I picked up the small bag placed in the middle of the room. On my way out, I took the opportunity to place a sticker on each of them.

Once they were no longer in sight, I swiftly toggled the stealth mode off and made my way back to Thorne.

“Okay, you can recall them. Tell them to check the back of their boots too.”

A moment later, the guards returned as they grumbled to each other.

“Thanks guys, we’ll do a few more tests and we can finish up.”

We repeated the test several times, and I then got their feedback. It seemed like going through the window when they were paying attention was a no-go, as the wind blowing through the window, coming to an abrupt stop, easily gave me away. That was definitely something to improve on with later iterations, but this current one worked well enough for a mass-market model.

We grabbed some food at the company’s expense and then returned to the clinic in time for our operating hours.

Now that we had one other surgeon, I could spend some time in my workshop to fine-tune my latest work and start going over the production plan.

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“Hello, you have reached Airo Tech. How may I help you?” A woman’s voice rang out in my ears directly, thanks to my auditory implants.

“Hi, I wanted to place a bulk order for some electronic parts.”

“Of course, sir, what is your corporation’s ID number?”

“The business number is xxxxx-xxxxx.”

“Apologies Sir, our company only sells to corporations that are members of Elevate City Consortium and have trade agreements with us. Thank you for calling us. Have a good day.”

The call quickly disconnected.

This wasn’t the first one to hang up on me though, I had several other failures. Whether it be electronic parts or raw materials, as soon as they heard I wasn’t from a corporation, they hung up.

With no alternative in sight, I called up my resourceful Quest Giver.

“Mr. Halls, how may I help you?”

I’ve still been doing a few jobs for him now and then, but there were fewer leads recently to ones that suit my criteria and were on his turf.

“Hey Fitel, do you know a way to source electronic parts or raw materials in bulk?”

“Apologizes, based on what I know, that isn’t possible on a consistent basis. We can arrange a heist to target a shipment, but that isn’t something you will get away with if done repeatedly.”

“I see. Thank you for your time.”

Before I could hang up, Fitel continued, “If you plan to continue your search, I would advise against it. The sellers for the items you are looking for have the initiative, and they only sell in bulk to other corporations.”

The next few days, I did some research and confirmed most of what Fitel said. Most small corporations couldn’t even source enough raw materials for their needs and would have to either mine it themselves or establish raiding teams to go into the wastelands to scavenge the junk there. Either of those options required significant investment and real estate off the island, so neither was viable.

So instead, I had to make do with the retail-priced products, which meant I had to dial back my production plans. It sucked that the cost was higher, and I had to make do with selling fewer units, lowering my profits. The margins were going to suck if I didn’t raise the prices.

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“Here’s the program you guys wanted,” Leo placed a storage drive on the table.

“Thank you, hey Clar—” I glanced over and found Claire busy talking with Lana a short distance away, “Here Thorne, can you start uploading it to the server?”

“Sure, I’ll have everyone install it tomorrow as well.” He quickly took the drive and walked out of the room.

“So you’re becoming more and more of a corpo, huh?”

“...It wasn’t my idea, if that’s what you’re asking. Those two were super stubborn about it; wouldn’t stop going on about how easy it was for our employees to steal, threatened, or be bribed to screw us over.”

Leo shrugged, “Doesn’t change the fact you’re going to be monitoring them 24/7, I’m not criticizing you though, any corpo would understand the necessity of it. ”

“Well, here’s your pay. Want to get some new cybernetics while you’re here?” My SAID sent the credits at my command.

“Received, not much of a fan of chrome. I’d rather invest in better terminals. By the way, what are you working on? Can’t say I’ve seen that implant before,” He said as he leaned over my shoulders.

I continued with my work and reinstalled the cover that was engraved with HSU-002, “It’s the new camouflage implant we’ve been working on, doing last checks on this batch, then we’re having a volunteer test it out.”

“This small thing? Where does it even go?” He moved his face closer to examine the thin metal board in my hand.

“It goes under the skin, and can be anywhere, but I tuned it for the mid-torso section.”

It was basically a nanomachine housing unit where the nanomachines had video and projection capability that enabled the camouflage ability. It worked similarly to the suit I had worn before but was much more compact, so people wouldn't notice anything while it wasn't active. After all, anyone who saw you wearing a suit like that would expect something was up.

“I see. Well, good luck with that. We got a job to do tonight, so see ya. Lana, come on, let's go!” The two exited after a little back and forth. Claire walked them out while I continued my work.

I took breaks and worked on a few clients until it was almost closing time.

“Hey there, did I come too early?” A girl with short brown hair said, behind her was a sleeping-looking Liz.

“No, no. You guys are just on time, please sit. We'll need to do a short surgery to install the new implant, but it shouldn't take long at all.” I directed Serene into the chair and started my usual scans to prepare for the installation.

“Sure thing. As long as I get the new chrome for free, I'm happy.” She winked at me before taking a seat.

I glanced over and saw Liz already seated in the corner, as if she teleported there.

I finished the operation within twenty minutes without incident after Serene was knocked out by the anesthetics.

Serene soon woke up, due to the lighter dosage. After some checks and calibrations, we exited the clinic to test out the new implant. For this test, I would tail her to monitor its performance.

“Okay, so the test will be to sneak into the den over there, search every room, and then get out.”

“Do you have an idea of who is even there? Might not be such a great idea testing this in a harvester den...” Serene stated.

“Don't worry, it's just some kids posing as a gang. They just hang out there, play, drink, and do drugs. Nothing dangerous. I'll be right behind you.”

Liz rested her hand on Serene's shoulder and gave her a thumbs-up. Both Liz and Thorne were going to be staying in the car, acting as our backup in case anything went wrong.

Serene calmed herself and started the infiltration with me hot on her heels.

Apparently, Serene acted as her mercenary team's scout and flanker in combat. So she was used to sneaking up to assess the situation, which was also where her desire for stealth tech came from.

Normally, she forwent stealth suits as they had flimsy defenses and were hard to get a hold of, but with my new cybernetic, it allowed her to wear her usual combat gear without any obstruction.

She went straight up the megabuilding toward the target unit. Once she was on the right floor, she maneuvered out of sight and spotted a bunch of teenagers handing out in front of the target unit.

The door was opened as loud music blasted out of it. She took a deep breath and exhaled before activating her new implant and faded out from my vision.

I switched to thermal optics before turning on my active camouflage as well, then followed her in. The unit wasn't very large but still had two rooms, plus the living room we had entered from.

They were teenagers dancing, making out, or just sprawled on the couch or floor. I watched her carefully move around, ensuring she wouldn't bump into anyone as she inspected each room.

We found one messy room with drugs everywhere, while the other had a couple getting intimate. Once we toured the place, we swiftly returned. The brief trip had barely drained a fourth of the uptime of the implant and would be recharged within the minute.

"Good job. I got a lot of usual data from the test. Do you have any feedback?" I asked the woman, who was busy gulping down a bottle of water.

"That was absolute zero! I felt like a ninja in those animes I watched as a kid. They had no idea I was there! Fuck, is this what corpo spy teams use? That sounds scary as fuck!"

I noted that down as no complaints, "Careful, it's not perfect as indicated in the manuals. This would be a cheap beginner version of what large corporations have, so you better not let it get to your head." She nodded, "I won't."

"Anyway, I don't see anything wrong with it. The gauge connected to my optics that lets me know how much longer I can use it is cool, but maybe longer operation time?"

"Right, that's something I'm always working to improve. Anything else?"

"Errrr... Nope, all good to me. I'll let you know if anything comes up."

"Sounds good. In that case, you can go for tonight, as promised, and you can keep that as payment. Please let your friends know about it as well. I currently only sell it in my clinic, but I'm planning on changing that soon, too."

"Got it. I will definitely let my acquaintances know. They're going to be so jealous when they see this shit!"

*Great, now to solve my production problem...*