

Chapter 199: Weighing Benefits to Risks

I was faced with a dilemma.

I could either truthfully tell Thorne and Claire about the system or continue dodging the question.

The system basically enabled me to bring up the company by providing various competitive advantages that got us ahead of the competition. Without it, our meteoric rise wouldn't be possible. We would've been ordinary at best. Even if we were talented, it would normally still take generations to build up a corporation and slowly move up the ranks.

Rising stars like us were almost unheard of. Those who were comparable were usually backed by one of the larger corporations. It could either be at the whimsical fancy of an executive's children, a test, or bringing up a puppet for political reasons. Regardless, having a strong backer was the norm.

For the same reason, everyone we've been against suspected me of having a backer. Even Thorne and Claire thought the same. I haven't told them anything yet, not because I didn't trust them enough, but because there were no perks to informing them about this monumental secret. It would only add a new avenue for potential leaks.

Who knew what kind of interrogation techniques others possessed? It was hard to say for certain if they had truth serums or something similar.

With that said, it also wasn't good to keep them in the dark forever. Right now, I single-sidedly decided the direction of the company because I was the only one with all the facts. I planned the direction of all our expansions myself, as it centered around the system. If I told them the truth, they could provide insight.

If I left the question unaddressed, it could cause a small crack in our relationship that could fracture further down the line. To tell them was a show of trust and not telling them was the opposite. It was possible there came a time when I would be out of touch with them again, just like this previous incident with Nova Tech.

If I let a seed of doubt take root inside their hearts, I may be exposing all of us to danger.

I did a double-take on all the new security features we had in place. No matter how advanced it was, at the end of the day, it came down to the humans who operated them.

Perhaps that's why no one allows AIs to have full access to security installations. If I were an emotionless AI, who knows when I would deem all humans a potential security breach and move to remove them?

“Okay,” I sighed, “I’ll talk. Lanus, activate the highest level of jamming around this area. I want it to be impossible for anyone to eavesdrop or record anything that goes on in here.”

“Recommendation. Move to one of the test rooms so no valuable electronics are damaged from prolonged high-powered jamming.”

The three of us shared a quick shrug and began moving toward one of the test sites outlined in our SAID.

I had copied a lot of the framework of how to run research groups from Nova Tech. It was something mature and already figured out, so I helped myself to it. This meant each of our research teams was equipped with large rectangular test sites.

We stepped into the spacious room with ceilings almost as tall as the room was wide. It could fit two football fields with ease. The entire place was encased in a layer of reinforced concrete with nothing in sight. There were only a few terminals beside a stack of crates and boxes in one corner. It was how we kept the place when there were no active tests scheduled.

We walked to the center of the place before we came to a stop. Immediately, a section of the walls near the ceiling slid open like a secret compartment, and several large satellite dishes came into view.

“Confirmation. Activate high-powered jamming, now?” Lanus’ voice rang out from the speakers integrated into the room.

“Go ahead.”

Within a few seconds, I could feel my entire body tingly all over. My SAID was flooded with various alerts as it raced to enter safe mode or tried to restart. It was a hectic scene in the virtual space. A courtesy of having a wide variety of cybernetics from different companies. I noted to myself to hurry along with our cybernetic project and create a premium model for myself.

Thorne had even worse than me, being a cyborg and all, but our systems were redundant enough to still operate in these conditions.

“Hurry up and talk, Rollo. Or else I’m going to have to replace every single piece of electronics in me after it’s over.”

“Ha, about time you boys upgraded. In fact, everyone in our company needs one. Every time I had to meet your partners while you were gone, I had to endure their bodyguard’s scrutinizing gaze because of the cheap chrome I had.”

“What we have is the best money can buy,” I quipped.

“Yeah, within the open market. That’s like for third-rate citizens as far as the big corps are concerned. Even the secretaries from Sensorial and Authentic Corp have better chrome than me.”

“Well, they did have generations to build up their foundation. What I’m going to tell you will have a large impact on that in the future.”

“Rollo! Stop with the cryptic wording. We’re here and everything is jammed to hell. Out with it!”

Both their gazes urged me to talk, so I did.

After spilling the source of my strength to Thorne and Claire, I immediately got to work. They were momentarily befuddled, but they played enough games to understand the concept.

They didn’t provide any particularly useful advice, though. They weren’t familiar with the eccentricities of the system in how it provided both knowledge skills and typical combat skills. They knew I had a plan and encouraged me to stick with it.

With that in mind, I selected two new skills to be added.

Status	
Level:	39
EXP:	320/3900
Musculoskeletal:	211
Neural Reflex:	65
Visuomotor Coordination:	87
Endurance:	59
Sensory Perception:	127
Upgrade Points:	0
Upgrades:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Stealth +7● Hacking +5● Cybernetic Engineering +10● Stealth Technology +12● Software Engineering +12● Electrical Engineering +10● Aerospace Engineering + 10● Particle Physics +11

Enhancements:	SAID: Zenitech Sebastien v2 Bio-Coprocessor: SocialCorp Lightning II Optics: Mirage Tech Clear-Sights mk.12 Cyberarm (Left): Nova Tech Heracle Mk. 3 Cyberarm (Right): Nova Tech Heracle Mk. 3 Auditory: SocialCorp Echo IV Vocal: SocialCorp Orator III Cardiovascular: BioGen Lifepump 5 Sensory: Halls Corp Argus Elite Custom Additional Processing: Halls Corp Custom ST Miscellaneous: Halls Corp HSU Custom Shade
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As I had planned, I selected aerospace engineering and particle physics. An intense flood of knowledge entered my mind while I got Lanus to monitor my brain activity. It was the same monitoring for our test subjects whenever we made new cassettes.

Time to see if the process is similar enough...

All thoughts left me as the information overloaded my brain. I had gotten used to it enough to not blank out, allowing me to focus on the feeling of the process.

The speed and intensity of it made it hard to compare to the hypnopedia devices that were slow and gentle. However, this exact fact made me completely puzzled when I reviewed the results Lanus recorded.

The map of my neurological pathways depicted a horde of activity throughout my brain. Even in the smaller branches that we tried to avoid when we created our cassettes. It was avoided for a reason. Whenever the information flowed toward these smaller paths, it would interrupt vital bodily functions, producing severely harmful results.

To be completely blunt, the results we observed were crazy.

It was as if every truck sent to deliver the knowledge to my brain was driven by professionals who put the pedal to the metal and successfully navigated through the downtown core. They would have to weave in and out of traffic at high speeds without making a single mistake.

“Lanus, any idea how this is possible? How do we recreate this?”

“Reply. Insufficient data to draw conclusions. The phenomenon observed does not correspond to any knowledge in my database. Additional tests and information are required before a conjecture can be provided.”

Well, I had low expectations to begin with. If this system wasn't some fantasy magic thing, it would be technology so advanced that made us look like cavemen. I'll just have to observe every time I upgrade now. Maybe in the future, I can discover something from it.

With the matter about the system set aside, I started deciphering my new knowledge. I intended to get straight to work with them, creating our own small arms and basic aircraft to start. But I also needed to finish up the power armor and cybernetic upgrades first.

I decided to spend the points now to get a glimpse of what I would be working with. It was vital to know, as I could make minor adjustments in my current work to prepare for how it would fit together. Some designs could also be done concurrently, like the design of the power armor and its potential new armaments.

It no longer was just recoil that the arm had to account for. Energy and heat management could all be integrated together for better results.

I knew the bulk of the work would be in cybernetics. There were just too many moving parts I had to account for to ensure the synergy remained high.

For that reason, I planned to get the power armor upgrade out of the way first. I already did a few upgrades previously, but I now had new and improved skills. It was due for another pass.

I had observed a lot from watching high-level corporations' power armor, so I already had been brainstorming what to do with it. The stealth was obviously our power armor's main advantage. However, everything else was mediocre at best.

Since I planned to bring forth particle beams as our premier weapon systems, it was a given I would integrate that into the power armor as well. I needed to think how it would do on the battlefield.

From the knowledge I gained from particle theory, I knew the weapons made from this technology wouldn't be able to pierce through energy shields like paper. Particle beams weren't kinetic weapons, but energy weapons. It would simply wear down the power supply of the shield at an increasing rate.

That meant it wasn't suitable for close-range weaponry. There was no point equipping our power armor with a shotgun equivalent particle beam. It made more sense for the weapon to have adequate range. It fell in line with how I planned on arming our spaceships. With large particle beam cannons.

For small-arms combat, it may not be the best option to lug around heavy equipment in stealth, though. At the same time, the more compact the weapon, the less energy it could hold and dispense at once. It would take longer to take out energy shields.

That was why I fell back to the next weapon archetype. The sniper.

When the topic of snipers came up, Max came to mind. He had gone off to form his own mercenary team after Flo and her other teammates joined me. The man always lugged around his favorite sniper rifle, so it could be said he was an expert in the field.

It would be worthwhile to ask for his opinion, given that he wouldn't just rave about his own rifle. He treated that thing like a wife, so it was hard to guess what he would say.

As I sent the person in question a quick text, inviting him over, I began my work. First thing first, the energy supply. Particle beams would be significantly energy-intensive.

The best way to synergize with a power armor is to share its nuclear reactor, right? Hmm, I can also try adding these mini reactors to the weapon itself, though the cost would skyrocket. Let's see which way makes the most sense.