

Chapter 92: Cleaning House

I had just gotten started working in the workshop inside the NLA office when a call marked urgent stopped me in my tracks. I commanded the nanomachines to cancel their soldering task and placed down the terminal as I took on the call.

“Rollo, about that matter you had me investigate, something has turned up,” Leo’s voice immediately rang out.

“So, there really was one?”

“Yeah, they quit the day after you left the city, and since your policies allow them to freely do so, as long as they follow the procedures. We’ve lost track of them, though.”

“It’s fine. There’s no point in finding them now. Did you figure out how they did it?”

“There are many ways, like I told you before. They just needed to have established a code of some sort before joining us. They may have to move into our dorms, but you’re still giving our employees too much freedom, Rollo.”

“Yeah, I bet Claire will be giving me an earful soon.”

“She’s having the intel department track them down. Maybe it’s time for you to go for the more intrusive methods and limit their freedom, as we’ve discussed before.”

“...Maybe. I’ll work on it and let you know.”

“Okay, I’ll send you the info packet on what I found so far.”

I soon ended the call and went back to working on my new cybernetic project as I thought about what Leo had said.

We had found a traitor among our employees who had sold off info about my movements during the start of the war against QuickLinks Logistics.

I had my suspicions about it after our infiltration into their headquarters had an ambush waiting for us, but then Joey told me about the troubles his alliance had had with dealing with Benjamin Links, the owner of QuickLinks.

He revealed that they always had issues with assassinating him, being an elusive figure. It wasn’t after half a dozen attempts that had found a traitor that had been leaking info to them. They were more careful in their next attempts, but Benjamin seemed to have a talent for either planting moles or finding people who could be bribed or blackmailed.

The thought of having a traitor appear again was nagging me at the back of my mind while I worked, so I decided to seriously face the issue at hand.

I brought up the info Leo had sent me and started reviewing it. One of our office workers had leaked that I went to the NNA continent and when I would be out of reach when I was within the wasteland. It seemed like she overheard someone higher up discussing it as they went about their duty.

Okay, maybe I will address this first. We've been getting away with it until now, but with the constant expansion, we're bringing more and more people who can allow unsavory elements to blend in. We needed more countermeasures.

I looked further into the file and they suspect that the QuickLinks had a way to temporarily disable our company's monitoring software without alerting anyone. Leo was looking into fixing the security breach, but I don't believe this was something we could prevent entirely. The corporations specialized in software would likely be able to replicate this if even QuickLinks could do it.

I searched the web for anecdotes of how strict other corporations' security was toward their employees to refresh my memory. There were definitely some horror stories of personnel with classified information being confined to secure locations that had no way to reach the outside world. While that may be effective, I don't believe that was how I wanted to treat my employees.

I kept exploring the experiences of my fellow netizens until it was finally time to depart back to Miles High. I was going there to oversee the construction of our new facility and to talk to our partners and potential clients. On the way there, I would drop by the Wells Clan and have them introduce me to the local wasteland clans around our new routes as well.

On the ride through the wasteland, I gathered my findings and began designing a solution.

Currently, the only method we had to monitor our employees was using the software Leo and Lana designed. It relayed all the information about its user's cyberware. Whatever they saw and heard was transferred to our company's central server.

With the current setup, even if I found a perfect defense for our monitoring software, how could I stop any moles from reporting back if they joined the company with a coded method of communication already established?

I didn't want to make my employees feel like they were prisoners, but there's a reason why the other corps handled it that way and it really was effective.

Maybe I should approach it from another perspective. To prevent most employees from even attaining any sensitive information and only inform my most trusted circle. Still, any malicious party could gain valuable clues from mundane information that our employees inevitably would overhear over the course of their work.

My software engineering may have a perfect solution if I spent a lot of points to create the perfect security program, but was there a way for me to deal with it using what I already had?

I opened my status for me to review as our car continued the boring trip across the wasteland.

Status	
Level:	21
EXP:	260/2100
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 +10● Software Engineering +6● Electrical Engineering +8
Enhancements:	SAID: Zenitech Sebastien v2 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 Additional Processing: Halls Corp Custom ST Miscellaneous: Halls Corp HSU Custom Shade

It is a no-brainer that my specialty is in cybernetics and stealth. Maybe I should use that to...create a cybernetic that secretly spies on my employees. I might not be able to create the perfect defense for our software, but if our monitoring method is unknown to our allies and enemies alike, then they can't account for something they don't know about.

With an idea taking shape in my mind, I quickly brought out a terminal and laid the groundwork for my new implant. I didn't plan on informing anyone about it either. The fewer people who knew about it, the better.

“Mr. Halls, it is a pleasure to meet you. My name is Sadarhrvin Runedeeep from the Bahar Medtech Corporation,” a fit young man said as he held out his hand to me.

“Nice to meet you too, Mr. Runedeeep.”

I shook it, and he gestured for me to take a seat.

We were in a meeting room we had rented inside a hotel in Miles High. There was a legal clerk with me and Thorne standing behind me on my side of the table. Sadarhrvin similarly had an assistant with him along with two guards who had their faces hidden beneath their helmets.

“Now, don’t mind if I get straight to the point, Mr. Halls. My company would love to sign a long-term contract to have you transport our medical supplies from Can Sauce City to our branch in NLA. We have a detailed proposal ready. If you would allow me, I can have the files sent to you right away.”

I nodded at his words and received a ping with the attached files immediately.

I quickly forwarded it to our team back in Elevate City to review and come up with negotiating terms for me.

Mr. Runedeeep was patiently awaiting my response as he took a sip from his cup. His lack of arrogance made him a much more preferable client compared to all the ones I had been meeting this morning. I couldn’t avoid dealing with those other clients, however, as they were part of the West Coast Agroindustry, which made them feel entitled to have us meet their needs.

Our expansion of vehicles was stable, but still required more time in order to run these new routes at full capacity. We had set our prices based on market prices, enough for us to turn a profit even if we couldn’t strike a deal with the wastelander clans around the routes.

After a few minutes, I received the terms to be negotiated and resumed my talks with Mr. Runedeeep.

We went back and forth for another hour before we signed off on a tentative agreement and concluded our last meeting of the day.

I spent the rest of the day sightseeing around the city, which only consisted of driving around in a large convoy. I studied the people going about their lives on the streets, some thriving while others appeared to be struggling to get by.

The lifeless eyes I saw on a few pedestrians waiting for the light to change reminded me of myself when I first came to this world. Once I had my fill of the city and sampled the milkshakes it had to offer, I retired for the night.

The next morning, we departed early into the wasteland. We planned to visit two clans today, one that we had passed through when we came from the west coast, and another near the eastern side of town.

The visit to the first one ended amiably as the Wells Clan were in contact with them, so they knew what to expect. They agreed to trade for everyday electronics and supplies in exchange for free passage, but only during scheduled times on particular routes where they would oversee us.

The second clan we visited was much more ambiguous as they weren't connected with any of the clans I had met until now. The wasteland they resided in was completely cut off from the one I had been in.

There was a wide stretch of land centered around Miles High, that was sandwiched between two separate wastelands. The one where the Wells Clan resided was called the western zone by the wastelanders, and the one I was visiting was located in the central zone.

We were only able to contact them because the Wells Clan agreed to send an envoy to pave the way for us.

With that said, when we arrived at their camp, I found them to be not that different from the other wastelanders I'd seen.

The negotiations went surprisingly smoothly except for the one weird condition that was suddenly thrown on.

While I was negotiating with their leader, his teenage son broke into the meeting and insisted that we bring him to learn about the city dwellers. His father supported the idea for some reason, and I was soon left with no choice but to take on a babysitting job if I wanted the negotiations to proceed smoothly.

We returned to Miles High that evening with an extra person.

"Good morning, Rollo! Where are we going to start off the day?" The wasteland boy asked. I had him dressed up like a corpo to blend in with us.

"You wanted to see how city-dwellers earned their living, right? Let's go observe the life of an average worker, then."

"Oh, yes. I always found it wondrous how so many people fed themselves when all they did was stay cooped up in the city for years on end."

We hopped into a Wraith and drove around as I explained.

“There are many of work to be done in the city, most perform mundane jobs like that over there. They work in stores that sell products and food...”

I continued explaining how the daily lives of the average worker went before moving on to do the same with a corporate worker.

“The corpos here make significantly more money but are under more restrictions imposed by their corporations. They are only allowed to be in certain areas and will have to apply to their company for leave otherwise.”

“Their clan restricts their movements like ours, then. Can I take a closer look at how they fight with each other? Our clan only allows official duels to resolve conflicts. I knew the city-dwellers were bloodthirsty, but I never knew they were like that to their fellow clan mates as well.”

“Their companies are well guarded. It’s not something I can show you.”

“Please. This is my last request and then I’m willing to cut my trip short and your obligations will be complete.”

We had agreed to a full week tour. If I can satisfy this request, then I can finally spend some time in my workshop and return to Elevate City. It’s not like I have to infiltrate anywhere dangerous. I can pick somewhere easy.

I pulled up the online ordering app and found several items I was looking for. I wasn’t looking for anything overtly specific, so it wasn’t surprising I found it quickly ordered them.

“...Fine, but you’ll have to give me some time and learn how to use one of our stealth devices first.”