

Chapter 198: Decision

It was finally time to spend upgrade points.

Ever since my return to Elevate City, I have been contemplating how to utilize my points. There were several options, but I knew my company needed some time to stabilize our foundations first. Things kept changing every month, so I decided it was better to save my points until I was ready. Now I am.

Having saved twenty-two points, I knew it would have a drastic impact on my future. I had more than enough to bring two new skills to plus ten.

For the knowledge upgrades, that was at the typical tech-level top corporations used. Of course, it couldn't compare to the areas where they specialized in. It was hard to gauge exactly what level their top-of-the-line equipment was at as they kept it classified.

I deliberated upgrading other types of skills only briefly, but quickly discarded them. Those skills were more intuitive, not something I could easily transfer to others in the way I could do with the cassettes. At the same time, I didn't want to go down the one-man army route. A person's strength was limited. It may sound enticing to become a superhuman, but it wouldn't align with my goals of growing the company.

We were still vulnerable. I couldn't afford to waste any upgrade points.

There were a few skills I had my eye on. They were things that would facilitate our future expansion. In order to protect myself, as my guardian angel had advised, the most obvious things that came to mind were all related to an immediate gain in combat power. That was expressed in skilled personnel and advanced equipment.

My cybernetic project was something that addressed this issue. I could upgrade something that complimented it, but I found the effect to be limited. It had a diminishing return to it. There was only so much we could do to improve the cybernetics. There was limited space available in human-sized cybernetics. If we tried to implement too many things, it was possible we may even have to invest more points in order to create the materials that could manifest these technological applications.

All these reasons combined with the fact it didn't give us enough of an edge, especially in our next frontier, made me discount it.

Our current short-term goal was to advance into the space market. This new frontier wasn't a forgiving one to go into. Having experienced it for myself, just having cutting-edge infantry-level combat power wouldn't cut it.

That was exactly why my train of thought arrived at spaceships. In space, ships were the literal lifelines anyone had. Without it, you may be stranded or worse. In the same sense, space stations were just as vital, but the scale of that was too large for me to think about for now.

Even spaceships may be a little too ambitious for the current Halls Corporation. Even a small ship that I once rented to visit Ferrumus Corporation cost tens of millions, if not hundreds of millions. However, with ships, we could start small and expand later. It would provide valuable experiences to all the relevant personnel.

To further that goal, I scanned through the exhaustive options I had in my menus. My search left me with the most obvious choice: aerospace engineering. Aeronautical and astronautical engineering were both likely under the umbrella of it, as I could not find them. I theorized it would provide aeronautical knowledge in the early levels before diving into the astronautical stuff.

This selection had been the safest bet, given that I had the funds to go into it. Now that my game had launched successfully, that requirement was satisfied.

However, I wasn't as sure about my second selection.

The only thing I knew I wanted to focus on was weapons. Having witnessed Ferrumus Corp and my guardian angel's forces, I knew the importance of strong offensive capabilities. It was a department we were severely lacking in, having relied on commercial products.

Despite knowing what I wanted, it wasn't easy to make a choice. There were too many weapons one could devise. Frequency weapons seemed to be the standard for dealing with energy weapons, but I wasn't sure if that was universal enough for our needs.

I only had enough to bring one more skill up to a usable level against their top corporations. Just like my concern with cybernetics, I had only seen frequency weapons at the infantry level. It was likely because the weapons of this tech tree had limited range. That's why I've only seen it in grenade form. As it trade-off it was able to bypass the protection of most energy shields, directly damaging the internals of the devices.

I believed something more traditional was more efficient. I wanted something that shared fundamental principles like guns and artillery. My eyes drew near the options for energy weapons, ones that could allow me to create laser weaponry. I had glanced over it before, when I first obtained the system, but avoided it due to drawing too much attention.

Hmm, it'll be something new. I'll have to start from scratch, but that's the price I'll have to play catch up.

I took a moment and glanced down at my current skills as I lamented this fact, but that was when I realized something.

I'm an idiot. I do have existing knowledge that I could leverage in weapons already!

My eyes rested on electrical engineering. So far, I have employed it to create our vehicles, our scanners, and a plethora more.

Its potential didn't end there. I regularly used weapons that fell under electrical engineering as well. The theories were in my mind, but I never explored deeply into its military applications. In the first place, I didn't believe what I could create would do much better than existing products.

Railguns were common enough among mid-class corporations and weren't anything special.

With electrical engineering having so much breadth, I knew its depth wasn't comparable to more specialized skills.

This led me to rest my eyes on another skill, one called Particle Physics. I had some cursory knowledge of particle beams thanks to it sharing fundamental principles with railguns. Unlike railguns, particle beams were directed energy weapons and not kinetic projectile weapons.

As my goal was a weapon that could deal with energy shields, the energy weapon nature of particle beams became more and more attractive.

From my tests with the energy shield we had captured, we learned they dealt with projectile weapons much better than energy weapons. It meant particle beams were a possible counter to these shields. It likely had intensive energy requirements, but I could solve that with the mini-nuclear reactors our power armor used for now. Then, in the future, I could branch off into these power sources.

Combining particle physics with my existing knowledge of electrical engineering, I believed I could craft a powerful solution that could meet our needs for some time. It could not only satisfy our small-arms demand, but be scaled up for ship-scale armaments as well.

Before making my all-important decisions that would affect my entire company, I called over my two trusted friends.

"What's up, Rollo? What do we need to talk about that we need to come in person? The first few times were fun, but having to disguise ourselves before dropping by isn't time efficient, you know?"

Thorne snickered at Claire's words.

"You're just annoyed we're buying takeout instead of sitting down at a fancy restaurant."

"Hey! I don't have to bring you the next time then, okay?"

"Works for me."

Claire glared at Thorne's immediate reply. Its effect grew as time passed, causing Thorne to give me a look that said, "Hurry up and change the topic, so I don't have to deal with this."

“Ahem,” I cleared my throat. “This may be sudden, but what do you guys think about expanding into aerospace and the arms industry?”

“What!?” Claire yelled. “Do you have any idea what you’re saying? Both those industries are a playground for giants! You just scrapped by the incident with Nova Tech and you want to test your luck again?”

“Claire’s right. Even with our recent success, it won’t be easy to jump into that market even with enough resources.”

“I may have misspoken,” I gestured for the two to sit down and calm themselves. “I didn’t mean to go wrestle market shares right away. The main purpose of entering this market is for internal use. I want us to be as self-sufficient as possible and have our own unique advantages. We can think about commercializing stuff much later.”

“Did you already come up with something?” Thorne asked.

“No, but I’m confident it won’t take long. We can put our newly acquired funds to good use. We’ll need to start by promoting the company to D-Class first. Then—”

“Woah, woah. Hold up,” Thorne interrupted. “You want to spend all our new funds on two large projects? I thought you were still busy with the cybernetic one and power armor.”

“I should be able to finish those soon now that the game is going well. We did hire an entire department to oversee it, after all. Then the promotion to D-Class and acquiring real estate in Aegis will take some time, too. All these things will take quite some time since we’re heading into unfamiliar territory. By the time they are processed, I’ll be able to get to it.”

“What about the new personnel we’ll need?” Claire interjected. “Do you have cassettes to train them up as well? Because I don’t think we’ll be able to find any aerospace engineers open in the market or whatever arms you want to develop.”

“Yes. With Lanus around, it shouldn’t take long. I’ll have time ready while you hire. Just focus your search for people with a solid academic background and trustworthiness.”

Claire glanced down and didn’t say a word. Seeing Thorne wearing a thoughtful look as well, I tried to reassure them.

“Don’t worry too much, guys. Just like always, I’m confident I can cook something up that’ll provide us with a competitive advantage. You wanted to be able to compete against the likes of Nova Tech next time. Right, Thorne?”

“Competitive advantages?” Thorne parroted. “...Don’t tell me you can just enter such a sophisticated market and still stand above those large corps? I know you’ve always delivered, but I still need to ask. How? Don’t tell me that NPC of yours is really the one providing you with the tech? To what ends?”

I met his gaze and sighed before glancing over at Claire to confirm if she felt the same. She didn't bother to hide her skepticism at all.

"What? You'd think I wouldn't be curious either? The timing is just too coincidental. You meet your guardian angel and shortly after you receive tech only big corps have? I know too well how much R&D would cost to even design the most basic spacecraft, and it's not an amount I think you could just hide away from us."

I had relied on my companions to mind their own businesses this entire time. I had pulled new things one after the other like a magician, and even I knew I was stretching the definition of what a single genius could do. Usually, geniuses were in a particular field, and they didn't come up with exactly what their company needed every time.

It wasn't surprising they knew something was off from the start. Now, with the recent interactions that I had with the NPC, it was understandable as to why they drew such a conclusion.

I had to decide if I should reveal my secret or not.

"No, it has nothing to do with the NPC..." I muttered as my mind raced.

"Then what?" Thorne asked. "I know you may not want to talk about it, but I still have to ask. Who's behind you, Rollo? Are you sure we're not just puppets with someone pulling the strings? I want to know so I can prepare what we'll have to face."

With both their gazes on me, I had to make a decision.

To answer or not to answer?