

The next few days went by at a steady, reasonable pace. I worked on building out the Spartan's available equipment, creating a variety of tools, weapons, and more for their standard loadout. After that, I focused on updating and upgrading several of their existing vehicle designs. By the end of the second day, Spartans were doing patrol sweeps of the desert on Mongooses and Warthogs, with dozens of improvements, ranging from small material changes to one that would be going on almost every vehicle we made from now on, the flight stabilizers.

Despite its name, it did not allow vehicles to fly, but rather stabilized and slowed their descents by a small fraction should they ever be forced to go airborne, or managed to roll during a collision or maneuver gone wrong. The stabilizers could turn nasty tumbles into much more manageable landings, reducing vehicle damage and the likelihood of anyone getting hurt.

It wasn't foolproof, but every bit helped in those sorts of situations. Even just reducing the impacts by a small factor could mean the difference between walking away and being dragged out. The flight stabilizers worked by linking several grav-plates to a gyroscope, producing small amounts of thrust to counter tumbles, stabilize jumps, and slow landings.

Between working on the Spartan equipment, I would frequently have to return to myself in my apartment. My treatments for my enhancements required frequent injections, serums, and pills, all of which I had to take at the right time. Thankfully, Frank was more than capable of keeping track of everything and could contact me whenever I needed to pause my building and talk to him. I also needed to take breaks to do normal human things, like eat and sleep.

When I wasn't designing or building, I spent plenty of time with Sable and Cassie, helping the young woman settle into the vault. It was still too soon, but she seemed to be recovering, her smiles becoming less brittle over time. I could tell she was still having moments, Sable supporting her as best she could, which was likely a significant improvement over what she was getting from her parents if Sable was to be believed.

Two days into my treatment, Sable took me on a tour of our factories, showing off how they worked and what they looked like in full swing. We walked along the catwalks, both in the sandwich plant and the medical equipment plant, watching the various workers build scanners, equipment, and sandwiches alike. Our first deliveries had already gone out, and unsurprisingly, sales were going faster than we could ship them. Jackie and Frank's sandwiches almost caused a riot as people were waiting in line for new deliveries at the many stores that sold them, and Tinkertech Corp was making money hand over fist selling the medical equipment.

Despite having started construction early and anticipating demand for our products, we were still counting the seconds until our new factories opened.

We were already drawing up plans for two more.

On the eighth day of the down cycle, three days into my Project Tulip treatments, Noah notified me that my waterside project was completed. He also let me know that the towers would be done in just a few more days. Both bits of news were very exciting, but only one required a trip to finally inspect the finished product.

The whole team, including Vik and Rebecca, all piled into a VTOL after I explained I had some things to show off. Jackie was lucky enough to be in a stage of the treatments that he could be moved, so he was moving around in a wheelchair, which Misty was pushing. He clearly hated it, but he was also too desperate to get out of his room and interested in the surprise to let that stop him. The VTOL, which carried us, still cloaked, over the city, landed on the waterfront building's landing pad. I had everyone close their eyes, guiding them to a viewing platform that looked out over most of what we had built.

"Okay, everyone.... Open your eyes!"

Gasps and sounds of surprise echoed from the group as they looked out over the water. We were standing on top of a [decently sized resort hotel](#), shaped like an L around the inlet we had purchased and remodeled. There was a pool, sunbathing spots, and balconies at every level. Beyond the resort was an actual beach, which curled around the inner section of the inlet, pristine and completely clean. Lapping at the beach was the water, which was crystal clear and blue, with artificial waves crashing down along the shore.

There was also another building, separate from the hotel, on the other side of the beach. The entire area was cut off from view by a high privacy wall, with sound-dampening tech at several dozen intervals, meaning the only sound you could hear was the beach. There were also [air purifiers](#) lined up along the wall, the same updated models that kept the air at the Ridge clean and fresh.

"So, we tore down the docks, blocked off this section of the ocean, and then dug out and cleaned the whole area," I explained, pointing and gesturing as I did. "The resort is self-explanatory, but the beach is filled with clean sand, and the water is completely pure, perfect ocean water."

"This is incredible," Misty said with wide eyes. "The beach is beautiful!"

"Thank you," I responded with a smile and a nod. "Noah and I worked hard to plan everything, and keeping it a secret was a challenge. But why don't we explore the interior, and then head down to the beach? Just looking over it must be boring."

The whole crowd moved inside, quickly piling into the elevators and stepping out onto the top floor. I let them into the standard rooms, eventually showing them some of the higher quality ones, though there were only a few truly luxurious rooms.

"Why are there so few larger rooms?" Sable asked as we checked out the balcony from one of the presidential suites.

"Because I'm trying to dissuade the rich corpos from clogging up the rooms and preventing normal people from staying," I explained. "I want this to be a place that the working class can come to over the weekend, to unwind and enjoy being pampered a bit while they stay at a beachside resort. It will be relatively low cost, but we will restrict the stay time to only a few days, to prevent people from booking unreasonably."

Sable laughed and shook her head before leaning her head on my shoulder.

"If it were anyone else, I would ask if you had gone insane," She admitted. "All of that will severely hamper the amount of money you will be making, but I know that doesn't matter to you."

"Everyone deserves some time off," I said with a shrug. "And I think you would be surprised how quickly small, but frequent payments add up."

Sabel made a noncommittal noise before we moved on and explored some of the resort's amenities, like the massage parlor and the underground nightclub. At the moment, the building was being run by robots, but Mary was already working on a hiring list, which I would pass on to Amelia, as I wanted her to run the resort. She would have the help of a few dumb AIs in order to make the process a lot simpler, but I still wanted someone to be the face of it, and she had the knowledge to run it.

As we made our way down to the beach itself, Cassie and David both took off running along the beach. The rest of us followed, though Misty had to push Jackie along a solid footpath. After a few minutes of enjoying the sand between his toes, the wheelchair bound man spoke up from a row of chaise lounges, where Misty was soaking up some of the sun.

"What's that building over there, Genio?" He asked, nodding towards the separate building across the beach. "It looks kind of plain..."

"That's because I need you to finish the design," I explained, smirking as Jackie tilted his head. It took a moment, but when he realized what I was hinting at, his eyes went wide.

"No!" he shouted excitedly, looking like he might fall out of his seat. "Is that...?"

"An empty restaurant, just waiting for a chef to claim it?" I asked, my smile only growing stronger. "Why yes, it is! You wouldn't happen to know one, would you?"

"Jay, are you freaking kidding me!" Jackie, putting his hands on his head, looking at the building with wide eyes. "This is... It's amazing!"

"And don't think this has to be your only location," I said. "We can open one up in the towers as well."

"This is incredible, Jay.... Can we look inside?" He asked, looking like he was about to try rolling himself there, despite Frank's orders to keep activity as light as possible.

"You're more than welcome to inspect the space, but it's not going to be much at the moment," I admitted. "We kept it simple so you and Amelia can design the exterior and interior facades to give it your own flair."

"But the kitchen?"

"All set up and ready."

Unsurprisingly, despite my warning, Jackie desperately wanted to see inside, and everyone else was curious as well. So I gave them a very short tour of the building's facilities, mostly because there wasn't much to show off. There were actually two kitchens, one for the pick-up window on the first floor along the parking lot, and another for the actual restaurant itself. The second kitchen was attached to the second floor with a smooth transport elevator, so the waiters didn't have to climb up and down the stairs. As I had said, the space was almost completely empty, but the windows were mostly focused out towards the water, giving them the best views possible from this part of the city.

"This is incredible," Jackie said, still sitting in his wheelchair, looking out over the beach and ocean from the second floor. "I... I can't believe this is happening. If you had told me I would be doing something like this when I first met you, I would have laughed."

"And I wouldn't have blamed you in the slightest," I said, patting his shoulder. "You've come a long way. I can't wait to see what you do with this place."

After a bit longer, we all headed back to the VTOL on the roof of the resort. After ensuring everyone was secure, we rose into the air. Once we were high enough, we cloaked and were promptly teleported back to the vault. From there, Jackie rushed to find Amelia so they could start designing the restaurant. Or rather, he urged Misty on as she pushed him to the nearest teleporter.

"So, when do you plan on opening the beach and resort?" Sable asked, raising her eyebrow as we made our way much more nonchalantly to the teleporter.

"That depends on what sort of tech tree I have next," I admitted with a shrug. "Could be this week, could be next week. The beach is ready, but the resort still needs some supplies and other things. The towers are due to finish within a few days, and while they won't be ready to open immediately, they will need a ceremony too."

"I will schedule an opening ceremony for the resort at the end of the first week of this tech cycle, and schedule the opening ceremony for the towers a week later," Sable suggested, cutting through my hesitation. "That should be plenty of time to get your robotic staff set up, and for Mary to review and screen the first potential residents."

"That... sounds like a good plan," I said, scratching my head, internally wincing at the added effort maintaining these towers would be. Seeing through me in a moment, Sable chuckled.

"Put a Dumb AI in each of the towers, and I will keep track of them," She said, patting my shoulder. "I'll have to expand my horizons a bit, but worst case, I hire someone who knows what they are doing to offer advice."

"Thank you, hun," I said, kissing her forehead. "You have made everything so much simpler."

"Of course, business is what I do, babe," She winked, before patting my chest. "I'm going to take Cassie to the mall. I'll see you later?"

I nodded and gave her a hug, the silver-haired woman walking ahead to catch up with her niece, who hugged her aunt with a smile. Once they had gone through their teleporter, I headed through to my workshop.

I spent the rest of the day casually building equipment before heading back to the courtyard and dropping off my ALEO doppelganger, using a wheelchair so I could eat with everyone else. It was a nice change of pace, as I hadn't been able to do so the last few nights.

When we were done eating, I got back into my doppelganger, and the whole group went to the vault bowling alley. Vik had made some bold claims that he could beat any one of us, and of course, we couldn't let that slide. We ended up playing two full games: the first in separate groups, then together in teams. Vik won the individual match by a landslide, but he had rather nicely taken on Cassie during the team match, which inevitably brought their score down. We came out much closer to beating him that time.

Of course, that didn't stop us from cheering when Samwise showed up with a trophy for their team's victory, which he promptly handed to Cassie, who accepted it with wide eyes. She rather excitedly carried it back with us.

The following morning, I finally made good on my words to Sable and put together a teacher and nanny Dumb AI for Cassie. Mary helped speed up the process significantly, and I ended up putting them in a reinforced ALEO unit on par with Riggs. Instead of having a liquid skin system stored in their torso, I worked hard to miniaturize as much of their internal systems as I could to make room for several hidden features, including a mag pistol, two spare magazine, a shield projector and several tangled photon links, which would let me, Mary, or even the Dumb AI hubs that controls our first group of Spartans, connect to them and take control if something went wrong.

I considered just making them a full AI in the first place, as they had an important task, but I had no idea how much use they would actually get. Luckily, I could take the data from the Dumb AI and use it to create a full AI later if Cassie and David ended up getting attached to them in any major way.

Neither of the kids was happy to learn their lessons would now be continued, but I was hoping that having personalized attention and a teacher with infinite resources would be able to keep them interested once they got started.

Next, I spent some time building a few cleaning robots, of all things. Originally, I designed the [service bots](#), the ones that served as cooks and would serve as general staff before eventually being replaced by people, to do clean up, but the more I saw of our new space, the more I realized they would take up a lot of room. So instead, I made a bunch of glorified Roombas that could handle a lot of the simple cleaning on their own and could be stacked in a recharge station when not in use. They would drastically reduce the number of large service robots, making the buildings less cluttered overall.

Plus, they would be easier to get rid of and easier to hide from the people living in, staying at, or working in our buildings.

When I was done with that project, I started working on a few other odds and ends, wanting to get ahead of any project or ideas in case the next tech tree was anything crazy.

When I finally called it quits, it was because it was time for dinner. Unfortunately, at this point, both Jackie and I were at stages of our enhancements where we couldn't walk around or even move much. That meant he was stuck in his room, while I was stuck watching everyone eat before I carefully ate a nutrient-dense paste prepared by Frank. It was far from the worst thing I had eaten since I had arrived here in Cyberpunk, but it was still not pleasant.

After eating, the group minus Jackie killed time hanging out around the courtyard. Lakia was just starting to really get the hang of walking around consistently, and we all watched him sniff around curiously.

Eventually, everyone headed to bed, leaving me, Sable, and Samwise to return to my apartment, waiting for midnight to roll around and for my new tech tree to arrive. I left the doppelganger standing in the corner as my mind disconnected from the link, my vision focusing on the ceiling.

"So what exactly does this look like?" Sable asked, sitting at the edge of the bed right next to me. "Are you going to start glowing and speaking in tongues or...?"

"There is no outside reaction to the change of tech trees," Samwise responded. "I have noticed a change in breathing and heart rate, however.... He also likes to make references, despite the fact that I never understand them."

"Of course," She responded, rolling her eyes. "How much longer?"

"Ten minutes," I said, doing my best to ignore the strange feeling in my body. A cocktail of drugs was being used to enhance my internal organs, which felt... strange, to say the least.

We waited together, the ten minutes passing slowly. Eventually, it was time, and I closed my eyes and turned my focus inward, to watch the final countdown, counting down with it to keep Sable in the loop. After reaching zero, I could feel the timer detach and be replaced with a new branch. As always, I dove deep, looking for anything that might give away the setting. However, unlike usual, nothing immediately jumped out at me. The world was more advanced than my Earth, but not by a considerable amount. I saw a lot of tech I kind of recognized from my world, only several generations more advanced.

"So... how long does this usually take?" Sable asked.

"Not usually this long," I admitted, my eyes still closed. "I-"

Finally, I saw something I recognized, and in a flash, I knew what I had unlocked. The only problem was... I had never seen the show. I knew the general premise, but beyond that, I knew next to nothing.

"What?" Sable asked. "Did you figure it out? I'm kind of feeling left out that I didn't get a reference."

"I don't know enough about the setting to give you one," I admitted with a frown, opening my eyes. "It's Westworld, a TV show about a Wild West-themed adventure park filled with what I think are meant to be mindless synthetic humans. I think they start gaining sentience at some point, but beyond that? It's not even that advanced."

I scanned through the synthetic human branch, which were called hosts in the Westworld universe. I could see most of the branch already, which meant the technology wasn't actually that impressive. Only the final form of the host was actually foggy in the slightest, though it still seemed like pretty low-tech compared to creating an entire synthetic, living human being, rather than a dummy that just functions similarly to humans, and might someday become sentient.

Still, even if there wasn't anything obvious, I wouldn't make the same mistake I made with the Detroit: Become Human tech tree. I hadn't taken that tree seriously and had almost missed out on the liquid skin system, as well as a huge well of knowledge about designing systems that mimic organic ones. I would keep scanning the branches for anything interesting and make sure to blast through the host branches, just in case.

Despite my determination to take the Westworld tree seriously, I did relax quite a bit. I would have plenty of time to get through what I needed to, so there was no reason to stress and start working through the night. I could take it easy, get some sleep, and start working on it later. I ended up explaining it all to Sable and Samwise, the latter of whom left, and the former of whom put her head on my chest to get some sleep.

The following morning, I reconnected to my doppelganger before heading to the Ridge with Samwise and a pair of Spartans. I needed to spend some time with Samwise, prepping for my meeting with the various heads of the nomad families. There were twelve of them in total, three from each existing, coherent, and relatively friendly Nomad family. Apparently, forty years ago, there were in fact several million nomads roaming the wastes of North America, driven from their various locations for various reasons. That number was *significantly* lower now, as most of those who were forced to travel out of necessity, rather than a desire to roam, had settled after the world started to really recover from the Collapse and the Fourth Corporate War. Now, the Nomad families were measured in the tens of thousands, not millions.

After going over the plan a few times, Dakota arrived at the meeting hall, the family heads following behind her. I shook her hand with a smile.

"I'm sorry I haven't been around as much the last few days," I apologized, nodding to Alexander and Panam, who were sticking close to Dakota. "We had the incident with some less-than-polite interests, and I've been recovering from getting some cyberware work done."

"Understandable, I was happy to hear that everyone was returned safely after the incident," Dakota said with a nod. "I've seen images of the crater your new robots left behind. You've made upgrades."

"Considerable upgrades," I said with a smile. "The shades we had before were adequate, but the Spartans are everything I was hoping to build in a replaceable foot soldier."

"So they are definitely robots?" Panam asked, a frown on her lips as her eyes darted to Riggs and the two Spartans standing off to the side. "A few of them have spoken to the kids that approach them."

"They have a robust capability to interact with humans," I explained. "Mostly to keep civilians calm, including kids. But yes, they are robots. Though I would prefer that it stay between us."

Panam nodded, and Dakota introduced me to the family heads, each of them greeting me with a smile and thanks, and not just for the hospitality and good food. Apparently, the family heads had been informed by Dakota that I was the one who had made the Electrocondensers, something that had benefited every nomad group positively. I had no idea if she had just informed them of this, or if she had done so when she first put the plans on the net, but either way, I was happy to have a leg up in the negotiations.

After a brief conversation about the general projects I was working on, things publicly visible like the factories, the town, the towers, and the beach, I led everyone up to the roof, where we had cleared the normal furniture and placed down new chairs. They faced over Rocky Ridge, so as I talked, they would be able to see the rest of the town.

Once everyone had settled in, with me standing at the front and with Riggs and Samwise standing off to the side, I smiled and clapped my hands, catching everyone's attention.

"So, I should probably start by thanking you all for coming. I understand traveling long distances for most people is difficult these days, and you all have very important responsibilities," I said, giving them a slight bow. "Dakota called you here because I have an offer for you, an offer for all friendly nomads."

I paused for a moment, looking over the group, noting that Dakota wasn't watching me, but instead watching the group of her peers.

"As Dakota has likely explained, I have a lot of irons in the fire at the moment, and there is a lot I have built that I am holding back from the general public. Both because I don't think people are ready for them, and to keep the larger corporations off my back," I explained, noting a few nodded in understanding. "One of those irons has led me to a point where I could use the help of explorers, people who have a taste for traveling. I could handle it myself, but I wanted to give the nomads the opportunity to... well, honestly, reach the ultimate expression of your nomadic lifestyle."

"What exactly does that mean?" one of the family heads asked, a tattooed man with a heavy tan who I was relatively certain was from the Jodes family.

"It means I'm offering you the opportunity to explore untouched lands, see things that no human has," I explained with a smile. "I want the nomad families to be my explorers. The first boots on the ground for the greatest expansion human history has ever seen."

"Son, that sounds an awful lot like you're saying..." The man trailed off, glancing at the people sitting beside him. "Are you implying what I think you are?"

"I am. I want you to explore new planets, scout them for places to settle, for resources, and for anything interesting," I explained, trying my best to project confidence. "Some of them will be garden worlds, others will be worlds with less hospitable settings. I would supply the tools, supplies, and anything you might need. You would get access to all my technology, which will protect you from anything these worlds might throw at you."

The group was silent, stunned by what I had revealed. As I watched, their faces began to shift, some into concern, worried I might have snapped. Others looked annoyed, probably getting angry that Dakota had called them for a meeting for someone who was delusional. Most just looked confused, unable to process what I had said.

"You expect us to believe you can get us to other planets?" One of the older members of the group asked, turning to glare at Dakota. "Where did you find this guy? You-"

"I know it's a bit of a large claim," I admitted, cutting off his tirade before it could pick up steam. "But I assure you, I can back it up."

"How could you possibly do that?"

I couldn't help but smirk, as the annoyed man had basically handed me the reveal on a silver platter. Alexander and Panam both spotted my smirk and tensed, while Dakota, still focused on her peers, missed it completely.

"Well... I suppose actions do speak louder than words," I said, before lifting my hand and snapping my fingers.

In a flash, the over two dozen teleport pads under the chairs, under my feet, and under Riggs and Samwise, all went off at once. We went from sitting on the roof of the meeting hall to sitting on a concrete platform on the top of a hill. Behind and below me was a massive forest, filled with [purple and red trees](#).

"Welcome to Avalon."