As time passed, we gained a better understanding of how people, specifically the ordinary, middle to low-class citizens of Night City, were reacting to the announcement. There was a fair bit of scepticism, as well as references to what happened with Pacifica, of course, but those would hopefully pass with time as we proved that we were both determined and capable of making this project a reality.

Of course, there was also the general corpo hate. This was not nearly as bad as it could have been, both because I was mostly completely unknown, and because we hadn't actually done anything bad so far. Almost all of the land we purchased was abandoned or nearly useless, and what we had torn down so far *was* abandoned. The only civilians we could have pissed off from that were a few dozen homeless people we had to force out of the area.

Sure, crazy people were shouting online how we were ruining historic parts of Night City, but most people were dismissing them. Not only was that stupid, since the places we were tearing down to build were warehouses and the docks, both of them unimportant structures that didn't really have any history, but the culture of Night City was very much focused on "out with the old, in with the new" anyway. This was just par for the course as far as I was concerned.

In any case, the general opinions about the announcement were mixed between flavors of skepticism, those who doubted us but were interested to see where it went, and those who doubted us and were worried about where it would go.

A few hours after we returned, I took a break from all the social media updates and spent an hour or so over at the campground, talking with Alexander and his people, and having lunch courtesy of Jackie's restaurant. The restaurant remained officially unnamed, but I couldn't imagine that would last long.

The Nomads were suitably impressed with what we were doing in Watson, though they were more focused on the rout of Maelstrom than the potential building. For obvious reasons, they weren't exactly excited by massive skyscrapers or shopping complexes.

Eventually, after eating what was probably too much food, I headed down into the vault, making my way to Noah's workshop.

Noah's private space, situated in the same area as the other workshops and labs, was a clean, minimalist room. The entire room featured a simple grey and white design, colored simply and precisely. At the center of the room was a large circular holoprojector, about three meters wide and two feet tall. It took me a minute to figure it out, but it was a rather ingenious combination of several of our light-based technologies, including what we got from Titanfall and Fallout. The result was something akin to the design system Tony Stark used in the MCU, but with higher fidelity and with an option to make the projections physically tangible.

Noah was sitting at a small, simple desk, reading from a tablet. This was one of the very few times I had seen him sitting and working, rather than supervising actual construction. It made sense, as according to Samwise, almost all construction on the vault, a mega structure capable of comfortably housing nearly eight thousand people, was almost completely done.

Some finishing touches were being made, but production was already being massively scaled down, with the MRVNs and equipment being reduced by eighty-five percent through recycling.

The fact that I knew this wasn't a cramped, prison-esque vault like from Fallout, but a fully open and fleshed out luxury bunker, with entertainment, large living spaces and more, only made it more impressive.

Samwise had immediately asked when they could start on the second one.

As I entered Noah's person workshop, the AI looked up from his tablet, placing it down and standing a moment later.

"Jackson, welcome," he said with a nod, walking around his desk to stand by the holoprojector. "I have taken the initiative to mock up several possible design options for our construction projects. I do not believe I need to explain to you why we should stick to one style for all our Night City Projects, at least?"

"No, I agree that making everything follow the same style is good," I nodded. "Let's see what you have."

"Very well. Please keep in mind that these are not final designs for the two towers, or the project at the docks, but simple mock-ups."

I nodded again in understanding, watching as Noah activated the projector with a wave of his metal arm. Once it turned on, he cycled through a series of files, before stopping at one and opening it. The image of a dark, angular building emerged, covered in screens and glowing lights. It looks so similar to the buildings around Night City's business center that it took me a minute to realize it wasn't actually just a picture of one.

"The most obvious and simple choice would be to mimic already existing Night City architecture," Noah explained, cycling through several skyscraper ideas, accented with different colors or different styles, all inspired by existing buildings. "While it would certainly be the most boring choice, the benefit is that the familiarity and understanding already in place would make integrating people significantly easier."

"People would trust it faster," I surmised, the architect AI nodding in agreement. "Alright, I'm not sure I like it, but I understand why it's an option."

"Agreed. The second style…

From there, we sat down and went over several different building styles and what their benefits or drawbacks might be. We discussed a sort of Neo-Gothic style, heavily inspired by Fallout, including grand metal statues and powerful concrete and metal foundations. It was certainly impressive looking, but I was worried it might make us seem too dramatic and authoritarian.

We also went over a style I recognized from my home, but that people here would recognize as a sort of retro-glass. This style featured large buildings or skyscrapers that

resembled glass structures, with shining pillars reminiscent of the Burj Khalifa or the Shanghai Tower. It looked nice, especially to my eyes, and would seem clean, precise, and shiny. I was unfortunately concerned about making anything retro, not to mention that the mostly glass exterior seemed almost weak when compared to the robust look of the rest of Night City's buildings.

Among the remaining styles was one I was tangentially aware of, though not from any real examples. Solar punk was styled with swooping, organic designs filled with greenery, living in harmony with the environment while hosting whole ecosystems. While I liked the concept, the swooping, inefficient designs didn't really impress me. Not to mention that while I wanted to rebuild Earth's ecosystems, I wasn't quite ready to start advocating for having whole systems inside buildings, integrated directly into inhabited work areas.

On the other hand, if I wanted to make an impact, having so many plants and greenery everywhere was one hell of a way to do it. Something as simple as grass was so incredibly expensive to maintain that very few people ever stepped foot on a grassy lawn. Which was why, when Noah offered me an alternative that had greenery in it, I was very interested.

"While I would enjoy the challenge of Solar Punk, I understand that it's too big a leap to start off with, especially in a place like Night City," Noah agreed while steering the projection to the next category. "That is why I have come up with a middle ground, which I have been calling Cyber-Solar."

With a wave, he brought a whole new string of images. Like the first showing, the buildings showed the same harsh, utilitarian edges, mixed with glowing screens and lights. However, accompanying them were massive gardens built into enormous balconies, hanging off the side of the building, which worked to break up the flat, boring sides of the large buildings. When the skyscraper got too tall to have balconies, entire floors were cut out to create garden floors. Rather than integrating the trees throughout the whole building, the greenery was relegated to specific sections.

The buildings were also more colorful, with several dozen colors working together to give the typically flat building a lot more depth and pop.

"This Cyber Solar is, in my opinion, a solid middle ground between total Solar Punk and complete Cyberpunk," Noah explained, swapping through some more images. "Combined with large windows and climate control, we could ensure the buildings feel free and open, while also retaining the strong, utilitarian feel people are familiar with."

"These balconies are massive. What kind of scale are you looking at here?" I asked, gesturing to one of the designs.

"That depends entirely on what sort of resources you're willing to use," Noah admitted. "If you want to stick to mundane materials, those examples are dramatized. However, if you are willing to look into the mass production of Alien Alloy-"

"We have materials that usually work better from Titanfall," I pointed out, cutting Noah off, only for the robotic AI held up his hand to hold me off.

"In many cases, you would be correct," He agreed. "But in this case, Alien Alloy has a specific strength-to-weight ratio that would allow us to build balconies similar to the mock-up images. If you don't feel comfortable coming up with some way to mass-produce it, we will have to create the balconies on a much smaller scale. Not necessarily a deal breaker, but something to keep in mind."

Noah continued to show mock-up images, showing several styles of the style in question. He made a point to show that the ground floor, the business park, and the mall area, which would connect and encapsulate the two skyscrapers, would continue the style, with a similar look to many of the concrete parks of Night City, accented with raised plant features and accents.

I loved the look, but there was a problem.

"Noah, with our new Jurassic tech, we can handle making custom plants, as well as building simple greenery that is easy to take care of, but we can't come close to making something that can take the weather here," I said, shaking my head. "I love the look, but it's the same reason that Project Clover is just a puzzle piece we can't place yet. The internal gardens would be fine, obviously, but the balconies and the landscaping…"

"What about energy shielding?" Noah asked, seemingly completely serious. "The barrier system from Fallout is perfectly capable of creating an environmental barrier."

"I've resisted the temptation to include energy shielding in all of my creations since the day I added to the database," I said, raising an eyebrow and tapping my skull. "I am not revealing it for plants."

"Your Macro-scale air purifiers could keep up with a large portion of storms," Noah pointed out after a moment of thinking.

"They… could, yes. They could even be beefed up a bit…" I said, trailing off after I considered the upgrades I could make, before shaking my head. "They won't keep serious windstorms or acid rain out."

"Then the simple answer is to create a greenhouse," Noah responded. "Not as free or open, but it would suffice."

"Well… Titanfall did have a rather durable flexible glass replacement," I said, scratching my chin. "With the right deployable structural supports, we could create a deployable greenhouse to protect the plants and leave it free and open."

"Hmm… Are you referring to the… ah, the scroll material for flexible screens…military grade…" Noah started, before going quiet for some time, accessing the blueprints on the projector. "Yes, I believe that would work at the right thickness. But what about our exterior

landscaping? Building a glass dome that extends from the side of a building is one thing, but the landscaping will be free-standing."

"Well… if the name of the game is moving parts… then what about lowering them into the ground?"

"Lowering the gardens into the ground?" he asked, tilting his head to the side slightly. "I… well, I suppose nothing is impossible… It would be a complicated system."

"No more than an extending greenhouse," I pointed out. "We could use hydraulics or some other method to lower the plants and greenery into an area filled with sunlamps. Noah, I've *seen* the things you make. Don't tell me you can't manage some deployable plants."

That seemed to get his attention, and after a moment, he nodded.

"I suppose I did say I was looking for a challenge. Very well," He finally said. "Does that mean this is the style we will be working with?"

I looked back at the projector, watching as he slowly scanned through more of the generated images. There were plenty of examples, and I had to admit, I liked the vast majority of them.

"I think it is, Noah," I said, watching images of tall towers which, while not covered in greenery like the solar punk style, were marked with it. "For Night City, I think it's the best we can do. Maybe later, when we get around to building our own City, we can try something more avant-garde."

"Very well. I will begin generating basic plans, so that we may examine our options with more specific data," He responded, shutting down the projector. "Thank you for coming. You may go."

I held back a laugh, simply nodding and leaving the usually quiet robot to his peace. Out of all of my AI creations, Noah had the strongest divergent personality, and while I might have preferred if he weren't so antisocial, I wasn't going to condemn him for growing into his own person.

As I left Noah to his work, I made my way to my personal workshop, tapping into my design program as I entered.

From the very beginning of this… adventure, what I could build and what I could learn from each tech tree was dictated by what I was capable of building and personally assembling. Initially, my most significant restriction was the availability of materials and parts. I just couldn't get enough custom parts completed fast enough, and the result was a lot of time wasted. That problem was solved initially by the universal recyclers and molly makers from Titanfall. The ability to print parts, even partially constructed devices, at a speed that far outpaced what I originally worked with catapulted my capabilities forward.

After that, my primary restriction was getting the blueprints from my mind, through my hands, and into the computer. Even with modified CAD software and predictive programming algorithms derived from the XCOM GREMLIN project, it still took time. Granted, at first, that time frequently matched with my partially limited production output, but eventually that wasn't the case anymore, especially when we started pushing our production capabilities into the stratosphere.

So, I created the direct interface implant. Not only would it allow me to control my doppelgangers, but it would also allow me to control a completely custom, intuitive CAD and programming software. At first, it was barely faster than the original manual method, but I was getting faster and faster every day. David complained that my design work, which he watched from a linked computer when he worked with me, was impossible to follow.

So, currently, my programming and design time was reduced to minutes, and my production capabilities were tied to a room the size of a football field, at least when I was working in the labs and workshops. In the main production center, we were going to build skyscrapers, piece by piece, at a rate that would blow standard construction away.

With both of those aspects firmly upgraded to their current potency, the only thing left slowing me down, at least at this level of production, was the ability to physically put things together. In order for something I made to count toward unlocking information from the tech tree, I needed to assemble it. People could help me, and I could use tools and heavy lifting equipment, but I still needed to do it myself.

This restricted me in two ways. For one thing, it could only work so fast. I was muscle and meat, and just like when I was doing design and programming by hand, I was restricted to muscle and meat speeds. On top of that, I was limited by size. I had missed it for other reasons, but if I hypothetically had the production and design capabilities I had now when I had the Titanfall tree, then building a titan, one that I could gain proper knowledge of to add to my mental database, would have likely still taken two days simply because it was just too big to assemble quickly.

Now, for some things, sacrificing two days would have been acceptable. Not only would I have *happily* sacrificed two days for a titan, but I would have eagerly spent double that time to build a Psionics Lab when I had XCOM, if that had been on the table during that tech tree. For other things, that was still too much time. For example, there were dozens of vehicles I would have loved to have built during the Titanfall tech tree, but even now, I would be forced to ignore them for other things. To this day, my knowledge of vehicles was so basic that Kaytlyn was still the closest thing we had to a ground vehicle expert. And while our Stealth VTOL transport was serviceable, I was willing to bet that even a low-level specialist would poke plenty of holes in the design.

Which was honestly something I should really work on.

Either way, I needed to correct the last stage of the creation process by increasing the speed at which I could personally assemble things. There were several ways I could do this,

ranging from simple to incredibly complex. Which one I went with depended on what my version of the Tinker of Fiction considered "my own hands."

My first step was to create a photon-linked, mass assembly system. Oh so long ago, I attached a simple grasping arm to grab and pull things out of my fabricator, so it could make multiple things, one after the other. This would take that and multiply it by a hundred, maybe even more, creating an all-in-one construction platform. It would have dozens of arms and graspers, all working together on one spot, with all the tools one might need. I would build one in "small" scale, just enough to put together something around the size of a mini-cooper. Then, I would test it with my remaining days of the Jurassic tech tree, building a random object.

If it worked, I would take over one of the several empty rooms around this workshop and lab branch of the vault and turn the entire thing into one massive assembly room. I wanted to be able to assemble anything from a car to a jet fighter, maybe even something bigger.

If it didn't work, I would need to investigate alternatives. Unfortunately, I wasn't actually a fan of most of those alternatives. The only issue I could see with an assembly system directly controlled by me not working was because of the disconnect, the separation between me and the machine. Therefore, it made sense that the way to solve the problem would be to eliminate that disconnect, which meant me getting a lot more intimate with whatever solution I came up with. If it came down to that, there were steps I could take, but at a certain point… I would probably choose to deal with the problem rather than the solution.

As much as my mind had changed about specific types of cyberware, I was not about to start using cortical stacks or cut out my brain and put it inside a sleeve. That was way beyond what I was comfortable with.

The design process for the manufacturing platform started out simple, basically just a platform with five movable robotic arms, but it got steadily more and more complicated as I went. The idea was to completely remove the need for my direct intervention, allowing me to lie down and tap into the control interface. That way, I could run the construction at the speed of my mind as I built whatever project I was working on. That meant having access to every tool I could imagine, as well as a way to integrate new tools as needed. Even more, I would need manipulators of different sizes, fidelity, and strengths, as well as different gripping mechanics.

Over the course of three hours, I designed, adjusted, scrapped, and redesigned several iterations. The system was incredibly complex, with hundreds of moving parts, limbs, equipment, and tools, all working around a central platform. All of that had to be orchestrated perfectly, balanced so that one part didn't throw the other off, and stuffed full of every little bit of tech I could.

In the end, when I was finally satisfied with the design, I took a step back and sent the plans to the production room. This was not a design from a tech tree, which, for one thing, meant that the molly makers could print out larger chunks of the design without worrying about devaluing my involvement. It also meant that the MRVNs could handle most of the assembly beyond that, leaving me free to leave.

With a promise from Samwise to let me know when the manufacturing platform was done, I headed back up to the living quarters. Several MRVNs were tending the garden plots around the courtyard, a sure sign that Frank was making quick progress on recreating plant life, producing seeds to plant. It seemed like they were starting with a type of grass for the majority of the space, thousands of seeds being carefully mixed into the dirt, sprayed, and watered.

As I walked around the common areas, I got a message from Murtaugh, explaining that Jackie and David were at one of the vaults' gyms. A quick teleport later, and I was walking through a hall of wellness and health facilities, with everything from massage parlors to an artificial onsen. At the far end of the hall was a large gym, where Jackie and David were, the two Night City Natives standing next to a punching bag.

"Most of your power comes from the rest of your body," Jackie explained, going through an exaggerated punch. "Think of it as the energy of your punching starting at your feet, traveling up your legs, hips, torso, then through your shoulder, arms, and finally, your fist."

I leaned against one of the larger weight machines as Jackie demonstrated his words, winding up and firing a devastating punch. His fist impacted the punching bag with a loud whump, the hanging cloth equipment rocking back.

The two traded places, but before David could try what Jackie had just demonstrated, Jackie noticed me and waved.

"Jay, what's up?" Jackie said with a smile, waving me over. "You finally want to learn how to throw a punch?"

"I know how to punch just fine," I said, getting closer, sitting on the edge of the weight bench. "You taking an interest in boxing, David?"

"A bit, yeah," He said with a nod. "Plus, Vik and Frank both say that getting in shape helps your body accept more strenuous chrome."

"Chico is looking for his first chip," Jackie explained. "Thought I'd help him tune up a bit first."

"What did Gloria say about that?" I asked with a raised eyebrow

"She's okay with it," David said, before adding in a much less happy tone. "As long as it's something light."

"It's better to start off light."

"Going big off the rip is a bad idea anyway, choom."

Jackie and I both started at the same time, causing David to roll his eyes. I gestured for Jackie to continue, and he nodded.

"Starting light gives you a chance to get a feel for it," Jackie explained. "I've heard some pretty bad stories of gonks starting off with a big chunk of chrome, only to hate the feeling. Ain't east taking back gorilla arms."

"Not to mention, we have plenty of bioware and a good chunk of cyberware that's pretty light for what it does," I explained. "Plus, there are always weaves. Besides, you don't need to go heavy into chrome to be powerful, just look at Jackie. The only thing he's replaced is his lungs, but that's a super light impact bioware made with his own DNA. Everything else is weaves, light impact implants, and subdermal. His only real high-impact chrome is his Sandy, and despite that, he is as deadly as they come."

David frowned, but nodded, leaning against the wall just a few feet away from the punching bag. He didn't seem happy to hear what we were saying, but he also did seem to be listening.

"It's all about finding what you need to make your methods work, chico," Jackie explained, squaring up with the punching bag again, his arms raised. "I have dermal and weaves for my weak spots, muscle lace for a general boost, then my second heart, lungs, and regen implant is to support my military grade sandy. Put it together and-"

Jackie blurred, slamming his fist a dozen times into the punching bag, before whipping around to the other side of the bag. He appeared for just a moment before he accelerated again, laying into the bag before it could even start to react to his first flurry of blows. He finished the combo off by blurring a final time, pummeling the bag from four different angles, each one canceling out a bit of the bag's momentum. When he stopped, the bag hung almost completely still despite the beating it had just received, and Jackie was only slightly winded.

"-you can do stuff like that," He finished, flexing his back a bit. "Not many gonks could do that without bleeding out their brain case."

David watched the whole thing with wide eyes, and I had a hard time not doing the same. I knew Jackie had pushed past most Sandy users, but that had been very impressive."

"You know, there are other alternatives. Eventually, you could get something like I have," I pointed out, tapping my skull. "Not right off the bat, as it's a bit intensive, but eventually you could use it to control doppelgangers like I do. You could make them completely robotic from the ground up, or stuff them full of bioware. Hell, you both could."

Both Jackie and David shared a glance before shaking their heads, both of them wearing looks of carefully restrained distaste.

"No offense, Jay, but…"

"I don't think that's for me," David said.

"What? Why not?" I said, tilting my head in confusion. "It's like the ultimate cyberware. It lets you enjoy the full benefits of being a borg or Gemini, without the loss of humanity. Not to mention interfacing with machines and computers…"

"Yeah, but… it's a cheat," Jackie said with a frown. "I don't blame you for it, but… I don't think I could ever use it."

I frowned, looking between the two, wondering why they couldn't see the advantages of having the computer interface implant. It wasn't a cheat, it was the best protection you could possibly have.

"Maybe it's cause we were born here... and we've faced this stuff every day, but… hiding from Night City seems wrong," David said with a frown. "It's dangerous, sure. But we face it head on."

I frowned, looking between the both of them before eventually shrugging, doing my best to hide my disappointment.

"Well… I can't force you, not with something as invasive as this," I admitted. "Do me a favor and just think about it. You never know when it might be something you want."

Both of the natives shrugged, and after a moment, refocused back on the punching bag, leaving me to watch. Eventually, after a few minutes, I left the gym, heading back to the living quarters, suddenly desperate for a drink.