

Leaving the laboratories behind, the four of us made our way back through the ship, walking through widened hallways. There was a good amount of foot traffic, but thankfully it was passed through pretty easily. We were a minute or so into the walk back when Sarah pushed forward and gave me a look.

"Did you mean what you said back there?" She asked. "When you defended the Brotherhood?"

"I did, I wouldn't have said it otherwise," I pointed out.

"That's surprising," She admitted. "Most people react poorly to the idea of technology being kept from them."

"Well, now, don't put words into my mouth," I responded, giving her a look. "I readily agree with the fact that some technology is dangerous and should be kept from most people's hands, especially because we lack a full understanding of a lot of it. On the other hand, I very specifically said I don't agree with parts of your mission."

"What parts?"

"The totality of it," I responded with a frown. "The obsession with it. Nukes, other WMDs, the things that could threaten the balance or wipe us out, those need to be kept safe or destroyed. And knowledge in general does need to be preserved. But what's the point of confiscating Laser Rifles?"

"They are dangerous weapons," She pointed out, her face dropping into a frown. "And we don't confiscate things like that."

"Yes, but other chapters do," I responded. "In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if a good chunk of your people are *frustrated* that Elder Lyons has taken such a laid-back approach to gathering technology. As for them being dangerous, so is a gun, so is a pointy stick. I don't see you running around grabbing those."

"... You're not wrong," she admitted, a slight line in her voice sounding ashamed by it.

"It seems, to me at least, that through the years since it was first formed, a good amount of the Brotherhood has forgotten *why* it gathers tech," I continued. "Gathering bombs and guns to keep them out of the wrong hands is pointless if all the hands around you are already dead."

I could have gone on, pointing out other failings of her group, but it was obvious that Sarah already agreed with what I was saying, at least in part. I knew she mostly already did, from the dialogue in the game, but it was good to see that this Sarah was leaning firmly toward putting people first.

The soldier remained silent after that, all the way until we reached the exit from the marooned ship turned city. There we paused for a moment, pulling to the side so that people could walk past us. We discussed our present opportunities and eventually ended up exploring

some more of the city's interior, looking through some shops and more. We didn't buy anything, mostly because we didn't really need anything, and anything we did buy would have to be hauled back all the way to Headquarters.

Eventually, we headed back across the bridge, settling back down alongside the camels. The soldiers stationed on guard explained that they had to dissuade a few people from poking around, but when they saw that we had well-armed soldiers and had a BOS paladin on hand, most left without prompting.

The few that did push for more considered themselves to be above... well, others in general, either from a sense of entitlement or deluded self-importance. Either way, no one stuck around long enough to cause any problems.

We were just settling down when Carlos and his people returned. He had successfully made our reservations in the barracks-style living space, and he had also explored the upper deck.

"It wasn't anything really exciting, Sir," He revealed with a shrug. "There are maybe two dozen greenhouses, some farming set up, and some space for brahmin, [rooters](#), and [rad chickens](#). It's a decent-sized operation going on up there."

"The science division also runs more hydroponics inside the ship," Sarah pointed out. "Don't know where exactly, but what they make is almost completely rad-free, which is something even our scribes struggle to accomplish. Which... honestly makes me wonder what else they could do if we helped them."

She added the last part as a mutter, and I could only just barely make it out. I did my best to ignore it, not wanting to put her on the spot with her own internal revelations.

"That's interesting, but good in the grand scheme of things," I said with a nod. "This city is really impressive."

Johnson and Carlos nodded in agreement before the latter settled in with our group. We chatted for a while before Kelsey brought up our stay, specifically when we were leaving.

"So, are we leaving tomorrow?" She asked, prompting several people to look up, curious about the answer.

"I think so," I said with a frown. "Part of me was hoping to stay longer, but... There doesn't appear to be much for us here beyond a place to sell our goods. We could stay to rest up, but I would just assume to push and arrive back home, then take a few days off there."

I looked around, and saw that most of the soldiers, as well as Johnson, agreed that heading home quickly was better than hanging around for no real reason. Sarah and Walters agreed easily as well, having no real concerns either way as long as we didn't delay their return for too long. Sarah had already long missed the cutoff for the mission she had been pulled from to escort us, so she had no reason to rush.

With a decision made, we moved quickly to prepare for our departure. We still had enough water to make it all the way back home without stretching, and we probably had enough food, but I wanted to be positive. We skipped our rations to eat food from around the city for dinner, and bought easily transportable food for the morning, so we could eat as we moved. That would completely reduce the pressure on our food stores, so that even if we had to stay a day or so longer, we wouldn't have to hunt or do anything extreme to feed ourselves.

After we ate dinner and bought our breakfast for the trip, we made our way to the barracks and immediately headed to sleep. It was extremely early, but I wanted everyone to be as rested as possible, and with some of my soldiers guarding the dunebots, we needed a few extra hours to make sure everyone got a full eight. On top of that, I wanted to try and make it all the way to the Citadel in one day, rather than breaking it up into two. The whole reason we did that on the way to Rivet City was so that we would arrive relatively early, without that requirement, the trip was much more realistic.

When we woke up the following morning, a small pessimistic part of me was waiting for something to happen. The whole trip had gone pretty well so far. Even when something went wrong, namely running into the Brotherhood before we could sneak past, it ended up being a potentially life-saving moment of providence.

Frankly, I was stuck waiting for the other shoe to drop, and it made for a very strange morning, as I woke up and headed out to the camels to watch over them and our piles of caps. I had to focus on not coming off as nervous or overly aggressive toward anyone who came too close to our space.

The sun was just starting to lighten the sky when it was time to leave. We packed up, strapped our bags of money onto our mounts, and without much ceremony, left the city behind. As before, Johnson, Sarah, and I took the lead as we steadily made our way back to the maintenance entrance to the metro tunnel. We moved with considerably more confidence now, prepared for each step and able to push just a bit faster.

Unlike the day we arrived, the sky was not clear and blue, and instead was covered by a thick cloud layer. None of the clouds seemed particularly murky when we entered the metro tunnels, but while we slowly made our way through the barely holding together tunnels, that changed.

As we climbed out of the metro system onto the surface, the pale fluffy clouds were gone, replaced by considerably darker one. By the time we were on our way through the city, the weather was only getting darker. The wind was mostly calm, but the growing blanket of grey above us absolutely promised rain.

The only question was if we would reach cover before it opened up.

"We could take shelter?" Sarah pointed out as we marched. "We would have already seen an uptick in radiation if this was a rad storm, but marching in the rain isn't any fun."

"If it's not a rad storm, then there isn't any reason to stop now," I pointed out, glancing back at my soldiers. "The boys could use a good rinse."

That got a few chuckles, but we still picked up the pace a bit. We were still restricted by how fast the Brotherhood members could go, but we did manage to move a bit faster. We soon passed by the bodies of the ghouls we killed on our way to Rivet City, eventually making it around the bend in the Potomac, finally in the home stretch.

Eventually, inevitably, the rain started to come down as the sun was setting. At first it was a light drizzle, but as we continued to move, it started coming down in thick sheets. None of us were melting, and the dunebots were more than capable of making it through the rain and the muck it created, but Sarah had been correct in saying that it would suck. Not enough for me to run to the nearest blown-out building for cover, but enough that I was really looking forward to hunkering down in the red rocket we had stayed in just a few days ago.

Unfortunately, after we arrived, the other shoe finally dropped.

We approached the front gate of the five-sided stronghold, with several power armor-wearing guards saluting Sentinel Lyons as we stopped. We were not invited in, of course, so both Walters and Sarah decided to stand with us in the small open area in front of the cobbled-together and reinforced, crane-operated entrance. It was a large area, clearly maintained as a place of gathering for moving troops and supplies.

After a few minutes, the thick armored gate rose up, and a small gathering of soldiers came out, along with Elder Lyons. He was wearing a dark green military parka, as were the soldiers not wearing power armor. He made his way down to reach us, waving as they approached.

"Hail, Wasteland Company," He called out as he approached. "It is good to see you return whole and hearty."

"Thank you, Elder Lyons," I said, stepping away from the camels, which we had gathered together as my soldiers dismounted. "Your soldiers were a great help in navigating the wasteland."

"I'm gladdened to hear that," He said, nodding to his two soldiers. "Sentinel Lyons, Paladin Walters, welcome home."

"Thank you, Sir," Sarah responded. "It's good to be... back..."

The power armor-clad woman trailed off, her body tensing and her helmet shifting to look up, back at the Citadel, its armored door still open. The reason why she did was obvious, even over the droning of the heavy rain. An increasingly heavy, reverberating thumping was reaching us, both through our ears and through our feet, and it wasn't thunder. We didn't have long to wonder what it was, as the first soldiers stepped through the entrance.

What seemed like over a hundred power armor-wearing soldiers poured out onto the exterior of their stronghold, all of them armed. With them came normal soldiers, armed and

armored, but of much greater numbers, maybe two or three hundred. Dotted in the crowd were scribes wearing various colors. Some were wearing parkas, others were quickly becoming drenched by the rain.

"No..." Elder Lyons said, his voice carrying a tone of defeat, betrayal, loss, and more. "God no..."

"Elder... Dad, what is going on?" Sarah asked as the soldiers continued to advance, all of their eyes on us. At their head was a small group, all of them marked as ranked soldiers in some fashion.

"... Since you left, there has been much outcry concerning my decision to let Wasteland Company go, despite the incredible tech they possess," He admitted. "I knew it was bad... but this..."

The moving crowd of soldiers and walking tanks surrounded us weapon drawn and at the ready, though they were not yet pointed at us. A group of clear leaders stopped forward, meeting Elder Lyons and his entourage, who were now understandably tense, directly. One of them stepped forward and released his helmet, revealing [Proctor Henry Casdin](#), future leader of the [Outcasts](#).

"Lyons," Casdin greeted, not an ounce of reverence in his voice. "You know what this is about."

"How could I not?" The older man replied. "You would truly do this now, air our own internal conflict in front of others?"

"I would do it in front of those who stand in the way of our mission," he responded, his eyes sliding up and over to lock on to me. "Before you let some of the most advanced technology we have ever seen walk away with barely a glance."

"We cannot afford to make enemies," Elder Lyons responded, speaking harshly over the rain. "They-"

"And whose fault is that?" Casdin said, cutting off someone he should have been subordinate to. "Your choices have cut us off from our brothers and sisters. They refuse to communicate with us because *you* ignored your orders. You ignore our mission in order to help the ignorant, violent savages of the waste, throw us against supermutants, and waste our lives! This, all of this is, on your head, Lyons."

The open gravel field, soaked from the rain, was silent save for the occasional shift of servos and hydraulics. Behind me, my men were tense, holding their weapons but not aiming them. It was useless, however. There were way too many targets for us to even consider fighting. If they made the demand, I would be forced to hand the robotic mounts to them. It would have been safer just to agree, to stay silent, to hand over the mounts and deal with the consequences... And yet I pulled off my helmet and stepped forward, a rising frustration pounding in my chest.

"Roger Maxson would be ashamed of you. Would have been ashamed of *all of you*," I said, passing Sarah and staring down Casdin as his eyes snapped back to me, along with everyone else. "You wouldn't have to leave, because he would have cast you out on his own."