

We continued to discuss our land purchasing plans, describing possible builds that would go in different places. It was more of a creative discussion than anything concrete, since Noah, who wasn't there, had a significant say in what sort of buildings we could make, and why. It was his specialty, after all.

"Barring any difficulties, the easiest place to start seems to be the warehouse district. It is almost completely empty, save for Maelstrom, meaning we can bulldoze it down and start building almost immediately," I commented, looking at some more of the photos Sable brought with her. "What do you think?"

"I think the docks are in the same situation," Sable responded as I looked her way. "There hasn't been any work done there in years. The whole place could be cleared out with no loss in jobs or civilian living space."

"Then maybe we can start building on both," I said with a shrug. "Resources are not an issue, after all, and the only problem might be organizing both, but I think we can handle it. Once both areas are finished, we can start playing musical chairs with the homes and businesses that fill the rest of our land."

"Not to sabotage the good, back-slapping mood," Kaytlyn said, leaning forward in her seat. "But I feel as if we have skipped a step. We may be purchasing the land, but we still need to clear it of Maelstrom. We need to clear out the *entirety* of Maelstrom, otherwise they will just keep coming back."

"We will. According to what Dakota and the Aldecaldos were able to find out, they have three main bases," I said. "One is in the warehouse area, one is at the docks, and the other is in the All Foods Factory. There are also smaller places, a few motels, a smaller warehouse, and the Totentanz, a Maelstrom club. By the looks of things, we will own all of these save the club."

"That's a lot of targets," David pointed out, getting a look from his mom.

"It is. And worse, every time we hit one, the worse the others will get," I pointed out. "There's even a chance that some of the spots we know of will vanish once we really start to push."

"Do you have a plan?" Gloria asked, beating out Kaytlyn and Sable.

"I have.... An outline of a plan. Using the stealth cargo ships, we drop off a huge force of shades and our heavy units to lesser spots," I explained. "Murtaugh will be monitoring them from here, directing a few battles at once. Meanwhile, our team picks the two most dangerous, most heavily populated targets and hits them, one after the other. With any luck, cutting off two major heads will make cleaning up the rest easier."

"You think we can take them all down in one night?" Kaytlyn asked, raising an eyebrow as she looked at me.

"No, not likely. Instead, our shades and heavies will protect our properties from reprisals as we hunt down any stragglers," I responded. "We will likely have to purchase that information from fixers, but it would be worth it."

We continued to discuss our possible avenues of attack until Jackie finally announced that he was ready. A minute later, both he and Amelia pushed over two carts, laden with dozens of fish dishes, some of which were served alone, while others came with sides or were nestled inside other dishes. We collectively oohed and ahed at the sight.

"So, chooms. This is a bit of an experiment, something Frank and I usually do on our own," Jackie explained, looking a bit nervous. "Now, I think we pretty much nailed the meats feel and cookability, now it's all about recipes and that last few bits. This cart is all normal recipes, while this one is me experimenting a bit. Nothing too drastic, just trying a few ideas I have."

After his explanation, he gave us some brief descriptions of each dish, and then we all dug in eagerly. Like the testing day before, it was a smorgasbord of different dishes, though since they all contained salmon, they felt a lot more high-class than most of the food from the day before. He did make a few simple dishes, such as a salmon salad sandwich and salmon tacos, but most of the food centered on the salmon as the main point.

The cart of proven recipes was pretty much demolished, while the more experimental cart was hit or miss. One such miss was an attempt at making salmon fishcakes, which sounded like a good idea, but Jackie had gone a bit overboard with the seasoning and ended up ruining it. I encouraged him to try again, since we were all fairly certain that salmon fish cakes could be delicious.

Accompanying the dinner was the wine that Sable brought. Most of the natives recognized the brands, eyes going wide as they did, realizing that Sable was pouring wine that was worth hundreds, sometimes thousands of eddies, as casually as they drank fake beer. The corpo woman didn't seem to care, and encouraged them to enjoy the drink.

"I brought it to show off, after all," She explained. "Hard to do that when you're all too nervous to enjoy it."

I was happy to try without the encouragement, finding the wine to be on par with upper-shelf stuff from home, but not the insane upper shelves where the clerk needed to ask the manager before they could touch it.

Her words did manage to convince the others to try the drinks, though, as I predicted, Jackie took that as a challenge. Once the meal was finished and we had talked about what we had liked and didn't like about it, Jackie pulled out a side project he had been working on. It was a series of vodka infusions, since we really didn't have the infrastructure or time to be crafting our own booze. We would, eventually, since I was determined to eventually have a beer that didn't taste like someone trying to recreate it from the description given by someone who hated it.

I also missed the occasional glass of brandy, one of my guilty pleasures from back home.

Jackie had infused his vodka with a variety of fruits, as well as a few herbs and vegetables, experimenting with tastes and flavors for his restaurant. While the cucumber did add a pleasant crispness to the vodka, I much preferred the fruit infusions. Both Sable and Gloria *loved* the jalapeno infusion, which I couldn't even smell without feeling a bit off.

As one would imagine, the introduction of hard liquor in various flavors meant the rest of the night was a wash, turning into a party that eventually spilled out into the courtyard as we all grew tired of sitting around. We only spent a few minutes there, however, as Samwise suggested we tried one of the entertainment options for the vault. He listed several things, but eventually we settled on bowling.

Yes, the vault had a [massive bowling alley](#). We could have gotten there by traveling through the main elevator, then through some hallways, but we ended up just hopping into the teleporters. We didn't stay long, despite being amazed by the retro-style building that had just been sitting, waiting to be used for almost two weeks now.

I made a note to sit down with Sam or Noah and make a list or map of the vault. I didn't know what I would ever use it for, but knowing what was there, and maybe exploring the cool parts, would probably be a good idea.

It was around the time we finished with bowling where time sort of got away from us, and the night spiraled past what I could seriously remember. I didn't quite black out, but everything did become a blur.

The next morning, I woke up bleary-eyed and in pain. Thankfully, Samwise was prepared for my issues, for as I sat up and turned to sit on the edge of my bed, he entered my room carrying a tray, two glasses of water with the Titanfall hangover cure already fizzing away. I grunted out a thank you, took one of the large glasses, quickly chugging it before my body fought back.

I then sat there for a moment, letting the fast-acting anti-nauseant, blast of electrolytes, and several other ingredients make the spinning stop and my stomach settle. I let out a long sigh of relief, watching Sam walk back around my bed, now carrying two empty glasses.

Despite my rapidly fading symptoms, it took nearly a full minute for my brain to put it together. When I did, I yelped, jumped out of bed, and turned, spotting Sable sitting up on the other side, leaning back on her hands with a smirk.

"Wow, that was impressive," she said. "That was at last four feet in the air, from a sitting position. Not bad."

I silently looked at her, my brain shutting down completely. She was not naked, instead wearing a black bra that left just enough to the imagination. I could see how far down her phoenix tattoo went around her body, the black flames traveling down her arms to her elbows,

the long tail feathers spreading out under her bust. Eventually, after watching me frozen for a full minute, she started to laugh, collapsing back into my bed. Her hair was still in a braided ponytail, though it wasn't nearly as neat and tight as it had been earlier, and while she was pretending to be confident and calm, I could see a dusting of pink on her cheeks.

"Relax, Jay, nothing happened," She assured me. "The night was over, you volunteered to walk me back to the apartment, and you took me home instead. We just slept, promise."

While I could feel my body slowly unclench and my heart start to slow down back to a normal pace, I didn't quite relax.

"I...Well, that's good. The drunk hook-up is a bit of a cliché, right?" I finally said, Sable snorting in response. "Not to mention...I would have hated to ruin a first impression by being drunk."

Now that got her attention, the striking woman sitting back up on her hands and fixing me with a rather heavy, searching look. After a moment, her trademark, cool, confident, half-smirk half-smile returned, and she nodded in agreement.

"It would, wouldn't it," she responded, pausing a moment to stretch, giving me a victorious look when I utterly fail to maintain eye contact. "Well, I think I'll be borrowing your shower."

She stood, revealing her bottom half was in the same state of dress as her top, before turning to head to the back, where my bathroom was tucked away. This time, I managed to keep my eyes up and away.

At least when she looked back to check.

I smiled innocently before she disappeared around the corner, shutting the door behind her. That's when I sagged, taking a sharp, deep breath, aggressively rubbing my face, running my hand through my hair.

"Well... That's not something we can take back," I said, rubbing my forehead, before shaking myself a bit. "Certainly going to make things interesting..."

I got dressed, Samwise returning with some clothes for Sable, as well as her previous outfit, folded in a bag. I waited patiently outside for her to change, before we headed up to the surface, passing through the teleporters, back to Rocky Ridge. As we approached her vehicle, I passed her bag to her, and she returned to face me.

"I would like to stay here for a few days after our deals become public," She admitted. "I don't think it's completely necessary, but the reaction may be stronger than we anticipated. If we inadvertently interrupt either Militech or Arasaka plans, the response may be... intense."

"Of course," I agreed with a nod. "I think tomorrow night should be our target, so we can hunt Maelstrom the entire night. You can watch the operation with Murtaugh if you want."

"I'll keep that in mind," She responded with a curling smile. "I'll let my people know."

For a moment, we stood there silently, before she chuckled and shook her head.

"Kaytlyn was right, you are dense," She said, before reaching out and grabbing my shirt. "That was when you were supposed to kiss me goodbye."

She then pulled me closer, our faces just an inch or so apart. For a long few seconds, she just looked at me, our eyes meeting and holding. Her golden eyes were, as always, shockingly brilliant. She stared back at me, and for a moment, I thought she was just going to pull away, or maybe even push me, a punishment for not making a move. Then she leaned forward, her lips touching mine.

It was gentle, subtle, more of a tease than anything, something she clearly knew as she pulled back, her eyes full of flirting smugness. She released my shirt, stepped back, and slid into her car, the door shutting behind her. After a moment, she reversed, pulling away from the workshop and leaving the town behind, her tires kicking up dust. After a few seconds, she eventually vanished behind the hills.

"Yeah, definitely not going back after that," I said, shaking my head again, turning back to my workshop.

Despite my grumbling, a smile was plastered stubbornly on my face, which didn't fade for quite some time.

Despite a rather... intense start to the day, I still buckled down and got to work, spending most of my time working on the Jurassic tech. I made solid progress unlocking its secrets, pushing our knowledge of gene manipulation, ectogenesis, as well as several other key areas. Over the course of the day, I made nearly two dozen machines, scrapping each one when I was done with it. My hope was to complete the tech tree and finish by remaking the most advanced versions of each machine, utilizing all the other tech I had learned so far.

I was very glad that the version of the Tinker of Fiction system wasn't forcing me to create dozens of biological creatures in order to gain the knowledge I needed. While I would have likely done it anyway, not only would the process have been much slower, but I would have been a lot less excited about it.

That said, I did plan to test out the process for myself, once I was sure everything was stable. I needed to get a feel for several aspects of it before I could consider the tech tree completed, and the only way to do that was to run the process, starting with DNA samples and ending up with a live, healthy creature.

I was *not* about to run and jump straight into the deep end, however, since running the whole process would only be useful if the creature was complex enough, meaning I couldn't just casually run the experiment on worms or something. It needed to be something of sufficient size and complexity, which meant I had to be extra sure I was ready first.

At around lunch, I took a break to walk around town, as well as into the campground. Alexander and a few others were training with their new power armor, with one of the units open, a pair of nomads examining it closely. Meanwhile, three other nomads were running and jumping around by the wall, testing their new armor's speed and flexibility. I also noticed that Jackie was inside the restaurant space, putting the final touches on his test kitchen. In all likelihood, he would only have a few weeks to experiment and serve the nomads, but it was experience he probably needed. I was far from an expert, but it didn't take one to know that cooking for your friends was a lot different than cooking professionally.

Jackie was tough, though, and he did have a minor amount of experience working with his mom at the Coyote. That, plus the experienced staff we planned on hiring, would help a great deal as well.

Once I was done walking around the campground and chatting with Jackie for a bit, I headed back to the shop, a fruit smoothie in my hand courtesy of our ever-caring chef. As I approached the garage, I stopped by what had once been a parking lot across from the workshop, and was now becoming our new meeting area.

The pit was now filled with a reinforced concrete foundation, inbuilt from massive concrete interlocking bricks, fused together with a protomatter fuser, a creation of Noah and Samwise. It was essentially a high-powered wand version of the proto-matter converter, with the stabilizing field set to a low setting. It agitated the materials enough around the wand's line of effect, sufficient so that when the exotic particle emitter passed, the new mix of material settled and solidified. This would let you fuse two like materials together on a fundamental level. As always, protomatter solidifying was not a perfect process, but fusing to objects worked better than welding, and was much faster than pouring concrete. Either way, I trusted Noah's judgment, as he had basically absorbed and dissected everything there was to know about engineering, plus everything I had learned through the ToF.

As I approached the construction site, I watched as the MRVN units began laying the first steps to the first floor of the meeting building. Behind them, another group of building bots put the finishing touches on the defensive wall that ran along the back of the in-progress building. It only took me a minute to find Noah, who was overseeing the final touches of the wall, the Hesco barriers replaced by concrete, metal, and reinforced polymers, studded with more weapon emplacements and places for people to peek over.

"It looks good, Noah," I said with a nod. "Making good progress. How goes the rest of the wall?"

"The rest of the wall is being finished as we speak, just at a slower pace," He assured me. "When our mass production facility is finished building itself, this and all other projects will accelerate rapidly."

"I don't doubt that," I agreed. "How is progress on that, by the way? Our tentative plan is to push our purchases through tomorrow night. Will what we need be ready by then?"

"The first stage was completed early two days ago," Noah explained. "That was the bare minimum required to prepare what we need to begin building large construction projects. We are now in the process of transitioning to the second stage, as well as preparing the necessary assets, including the army of shades, heavies, and Cargo VTOLs. Not to mention more MRVNs. We will be well ahead of schedule, even if we are delayed a full day."

"That's... significantly ahead of schedule," I responded, tilting my head, racking my brain for the original numbers he gave me. "Right?"

"It is," He admitted, a slight edge of annoyance leaking into his voice. "I continue to struggle to properly calculate the weight that 'infinite resources' adds to the speed of a large-scale build. I believe it is a fundamental error in my learning matrix. Samwise agrees, but does not find it as annoying as I do, as his projects are considerably smaller and therefore less affected."

"That... that is concerning," I said with a frown. "Would you like me to take a look?"

"No. I believe... I would prefer to correct the calculation error myself," the usually quiet and short-spoken AI responded. "I will learn. Eventually."

"Well... if it becomes a serious problem, I might have to ask for a quicker solution than slowly learning to work around it," I said with a frown. "But until then, I will respect your wishes."

"Appreciated," He said with a nod.

"Thanks for filling me in," I respond, reaching out to pat the AI's shoulder. "Looking forward to what you can do when you have a proper supply chain backing up your production."

"I am as well, Sir," He responded. "We also need to discuss our final plans for the style and locations we wish to build in. Samwise shared that our first projects will be located in the warehouse district and dock yards, but we still have much to plan."

"Tomorrow night, Sable will be joining us here, before our purchases become public and we go out to start clearing locations," I explained. "We can pull in everyone to discuss our aesthetic, and what is going where. Does that work?"

"Yes," he responded simply. "Is that all, Jackson?"

"It is, thanks again, Noah," I said, giving him a wave before turning around and letting him get back to his work, returning to the garage so I could do the same.

For the rest of the day, and a good chunk of the following one, I continued to work on the Jurassic tech tree, continuing to make good progress. By the time I put down my tools, I was quickly approaching the point where both the tech and I were beginning to feel fleshed out enough to start thinking about our first proper delve into producing life from... basically nothing. I would probably start with some single-celled organisms, experimenting with their DNA, and then move on to a few larger tests. When I was confident the process was solid, I would try something more sizable.

Not long after I was done working for the day, everyone started to gather at the vault, arriving at the Ridge and passing down through the teleporter room. While it was unlikely that any of the more dangerous companies would react to our sudden takeover with immediate violence, Sable had been right to err on the side of caution. The chances were not zero, so we should treat it as a possibility. So, to keep everyone safe, everyone in the know was spending the night, as well as a few days after, at the vault.

Sable had given me a sly smile when she arrived, but beyond that made no comment on the rather interesting morning we shared not too long ago.

There was a tension, a nervous energy running through us, as we all knew this was a huge step. No longer would we be able to hide behind our walls and pretend to be a small-time group working on small things. Suddenly purchasing a substantial portion of Northside would put us on everyone's radar. It was a bit daunting to realize that, in just a handful of hours, we would likely be on the daily briefing for the most important people on the planet, since Night City was a hot topic around the world, not just in NUSA.

Jackie treated us to a light dinner, as he correctly guessed none of us would really want anything heavy, before some of us eventually moved to a [conference room](#), led by Samwise. After being introduced to the bowling alley, we had quite emphatically corrected his assumption that we were just too lazy to move around the completed sections of the vault, that we hadn't realized we had a variety of amenities now.

We were quickly joined by Noah, and together we discussed our building options. Noah agreed that the warehouse district was the best place to start building, but he also pointed out something poignant.

"This area is large enough for several projects at once," He explained, referring to the warehouse district. "Perhaps the scale is lost because of how pulled out the map is, but focus your eyes here. This is Megabuilding H10. We could build five of them inside the abandoned warehouse district alone."

"That... okay, that does put things into perspective," I admitted, looking at the map Sable had handed out previously in a new light. "What do you suggest then?"

"I suggest we do at least two large vertical buildings in the warehouse area. One for general business, and another as a mall with apartments on top," The AI explained. "We then create a business park filled with shops and other amenities around them. This will make security easier, since all our projects would be in one space, and would centralize our first projects, increasing their impact."

"It would also give us space to move the businesses and people we are kicking out to tear down other spots," I added, Noah nodding in confirmation. "It's a good idea. There would even be plenty of space for a restaurant."

Jackie perked up at the mention of his future restaurant, and I couldn't help but chuckle at his eagerness. We continued to discuss the idea of a business park, vertical mall, and apartment complex, Noah offering ideas and possible designs. As the night passed, nearing midnight, Sable eventually received word that our purchases had been officially filed and were now public record.

"Depending on how closely they are watching things like that, a lot of people are getting phone calls right now," Sable said with a smirk. "I do not envy them. But, the sales are all bulletproof, I read the contracts myself."

"In that case, it's about time we start kicking Maelstrom out of our property," I said with a smirk. "Is everyone ready?"

Across the table, Jackie, Kaytlyn, Riggs, Rebecca, and Gloria all nodded, and I could help but grin.

"Alright. Give me a minute to go change into something a bit more disposable, and then Samwise can guide us to our primary production and staging area," I said, standing up and leaning on the table. "I'll see you all in the courtyard."

I quickly headed back to the living area, lying down in my bed and activating the connection to one of the ALEO doppelgangers. It only took a minute to confirm everything was functioning properly, before leaving the secured storage room and heading out to find the waiting for me in the courtyard.

After a simple nod to Samwise, we all piled into the central elevator, Sable and David following us in despite the fact that neither of them was getting close to the combat. I could see David looking at Rebecca, almost visibly wondering if she was close enough to his age that he could lever a solid "if she can go, why can't I?" argument, but a quick glare from his mom as the elevator doors sealed shut kept him quiet.

The elevator dropped, and we descended through the facility, the elevator plummeting through stone and metal. After nearly a minute, David looked over at me.

"So why didn't we just teleport here?" He asked. "Aren't you guys on the-"

His words were cut off completely when the elevator suddenly changed. What I thought were simple mirrors shifted tints, and suddenly we were surrounded on three sides by huge windows, which, in turn, looked out through the transparent walls of the elevator shaft.

Past that was the single largest room I had ever seen.

Idly, I realized that Noah must have used the room Sable and I had used to demonstrate and try out some of our tech, then doubled it... and then doubled that.

At least.

[The room was massive](#), large enough that I struggled to really judge its size. In one corner, I could see the staging area, where a row of my Cargo VTOLs stood, ready to fly, along with a small army of shades and heavies. Across the massive hangar was a staging area for materials, with row after row of cargo containers, ready for transport.

There were four massive pillars of heavily reinforced stone, each acting as the support for one quadrant of the gigantic underground facility. Several large buildings were built into their bases, one of which merged with a much larger, multi-story building. Alongside that was a huge molly maker yard, with machines taller than I was printing out large projects, all at once.

The facility was gigantic, a flurry of activity, and beyond anything I had ever seen before.

"Note to self... be careful when asking Noah to go all out," I muttered, the elevator still descending.