

Surprisingly, considering just how much I had eaten the previous night, I woke up early the next morning. Rather than just turning over and going back to sleep, I went through my morning routine, quickly showering and changing into my everyday work clothes. I was about to step into my personal teleporter when my HUD blinked with a message from Murtaugh. Apparently, David was up as well, hanging out in the courtyard, watching the sunrise on the wall.

Rather than go out empty-handed, I grabbed two cups of coffee from my small kitchen and headed out, finding the teen right where Murtaugh had said, sitting on one of the benches around the empty center garden. He turned as he spotted me, sitting up and watching as I approached. When I was close enough, I handed him one of the mugs before taking a seat on the bench next to his, so I wasn't crowding him.

"Here, anyone up this early needs at least one cup to wake up," I said, the young man nodding in agreement.

"Thanks." He responded simply, taking a sip and nodding in appreciation.

For a long moment, we silently sipped our drinks, watching the fake sun creep up over the horizon, feeling the warmth as the sunlight reached us, bathing us in its light, despite being deep underground. Eventually, the high schooler did speak up, putting the mug down on the bench beside him.

"Mind if I ask a question?"

"Sure," I responded with a shrug. "Can't promise I'll answer, but asking isn't a crime."

"You put on a big show for Mom and I yesterday," He said, turning to watch me. "Why put so much effort into us? I know Mom's good at what she does, and apparently she used to be some nova badass working for the Valintinos... but why us?"

"Oh, that's easy. It's because you're both good people," I responded with a smile.

"Neither of you is a saint, don't get me wrong, but something about you to... whatever breaks people in Night City, whatever it is that corrupts and twists and breaks people... You two stuck through it."

He didn't seem to know how to take what I said, staring back at me with a confused look, and internally, I winced. Listening to what I had just said, I very quickly realized that I wasn't quite sure of the best way to explain the situation effectively. I couldn't exactly explain that I saw a version of his life where everything went to shit, and that, despite all of that, I thought they were both worth helping. After considering it for a moment, I tried attacking it from a different angle.

"Okay, think about it like this. You're trying to build something, let's say... a stone wall. I could buy a pile of stone, throw it together all haphazardly until I had something approaching what I wanted. How long do you think that wall will last?"

"Not very long," he responded, his confusion tangible.

"Right, nothing would line up, it would be a mess, and it would fall apart," I agreed with a nod. "Now imagine I hand-made each stone. I could carve each one from the ground, measure it, weigh it, and precisely test its durability. How long do you think the wall would last then?"

"You're saying that by spending time and finding people who fit perfectly, you're building a better team?" The young adult guessed. "But that just leads back to why you think my mom would be a good fit!"

"You and your mom," I corrected. "Why, I think you and your mom are a good fit."

"Doesn't change the question."

"I think you and your mother are a good fit, both because you are smart, have great potential, and despite being surrounded by the steaming cesspool that is Night City, neither of you has given a single inch," I explained. "Sure, your mom used to cut it with the Valentinos, and she might dabble in some under-the-table deals, but neither of you really submitted. You could have bent the knee to any of your corpo classmates and they would have happily protected a new toady, but instead you chose to stand tall. Your mom could have been a Valentino rock star by now, but she wanted you to have more than that. Like I said, neither of you is squeaky clean, but you both have a moral foundation and drive that I think will fit perfectly with us. It's something you can bet on, something you can rely on, and it's worth more than any secret cyberware or impressive kill count."

Again, he looked at me, his face not quite dismissive, but rather as if he were deciding if he liked my answer enough. I took another long sip from my drink, finished the mug of coffee, and placed it on the bench for one of the cleaning droids to grab. I stood up and stretched before nodding towards the teleport room door.

"Hey, wanna come help me build something that could eventually let me bring dinosaurs back to life?"

Watching his expression go from curious to confused, then for his eyes to widen and his jaw hang open was perfect, and I couldn't help but laugh. His expression dropped, but I waved his annoyance away.

"Oh no, I was serious, kiddo, the shit we are working on is freaking crazy," I assured him with a chuckle. "I'm currently chewing on some ideas for taking DNA samples and recreating the animals from the ground up. I'm still in the early stages, but... well, while I might not make velociraptors just yet, how would you like to have the first golden retriever on the planet in the last few decades?"

That lit up his eyes, just as much if not more than my original dinosaur stinger. I led him to the teleporter room, stopping by my room to get Duke, the canine facsimile sniffing at David as he came running out. David was immediately enamored with the faux canine, scratching his head and calling him a good boy.

"What is he?" David asked, kneeling beside the sleek armored canine.

"He is an artificial guard dog, heavily armored with some engaging programming," I explained with a smile. "I made a few different animals, but Duke and Kaytlyn's cat, Nova, were the only two who really caught on."

I liked my creation, and Duke had already proven its worth, but the whole Zoomorph push I had worked on had turned into a bit of a flop. Most of them had been too big to keep around frequently, and so they were sitting in storage, powered off and collecting dust. Only Nova, Kaytlyn's cat, saw much use, helping the sniper keep an eye on her surroundings, spot targets, and do windage calculations. Even Duke, as helpful as he was, had lost a bit of his shine, as much as I hated to admit it. His programming was advanced, but he was not sentient, so I had already started to notice his programming loops.

I already had Samwise buying up any sample of DNA we could get from a variety of animals, ready for me to start working my Jurassic magic on, as soon as we reached that far in the tech tree. I wanted an actual pet, and Duke was ready to retire.

Or, his model might actually make a good mass-produced companion for the shades, since they lacked any fundamental melee skills. After some upgrades, of course.

As we left the bunker behind, I asked Murtaugh to leave a message for Gloria to explain where her son was. I did not want to deal with her John Wicking her way through my base because he thought I took her son. Not long after that, we finally arrived at the workshop. There, all set up for us were the parts for a couple of new machines, all ready for us to assemble. A pair of MRVNs was also waiting to help, if needed, which we likely would.

"Alright, kid, might want to take off that jacket," I suggested, tugging at his collar. "I might be hoping you don't go back, but your mom will be pissed if you ruin your school uniform."

He nodded and hung his jacket up along the wall before joining me by one of the piles of parts. He reached out, taking a small piece and turning it over in his hand.

"So what is all this?" the young man asked, looking over everything else. "These look kinda low tech..."

"That's 'cause they are," I explained with a shrug. "I... well, I have a bit of a weird process for developing advanced tech. This is an iteration of a DNA sequence. It might look outdated, but it's just as powerful as the stuff Biotechnica uses, and I'm hoping this is just a stepping stone for several more advanced versions. Putting it together... well, it helps me see what comes next."

".... Sure, alright," he accepted after a moment. "I've heard weirder. What do you need me to do?"

I directed him to a tool tray, and together we began assembling the sequencer, starting with smaller parts and gradually assembling them into larger and larger components. It was absolutely slower going than if I just had the MRVNs or Samwise helping me, but I was able to explain the process pretty well to David, and the kid picked it up basically as fast as I could.

By the time we were putting the finishing touches on the machine, one thing was clear. David was an absolutely brilliant kid. I'm not sure if he ever came across as a genius in the show or not, but he was handily taking what I explained and applying it to what he already knew about genetics and biology. It wasn't much, since he was still in high school, but he was correct way more often than he had any right to be, and it was only getting more frequent the more I explained.

Eventually, as we sealed the outer protective shell around the sequencer, I asked him how he was doing in school, and the kid shrugged.

"Not much better than average," He said with a frown. "The corpo kids set a high bar."

"Please, corpo kids are just as likely to be idiots as we are," I pointed out with a scoff. "I know you're better than just average, David, the last hour proves that in spades. You are clearly smart, you should be curb-stomping those idiots."

He looked down at the small wrench he was holding, turning it over his fingers. Sensing a moment, I pulled back from the sequencer as well, waiting for him to speak up.

"Honestly, it's kind of crap," he finally said, shaking his head. "We sit around watching BD, then they throw tests at us. The BDs are just so boring, but when I take the tests, nothing seems to stick. It's like one minute I know it all, then the next it's gone."

He tapped his temple, frustration leaking into his voice. For a moment, I thought he was going to throw the wrench, but he let out a long breath before lowering his hand.

"They don't even give you study materials, corpo fucks are scared someone might steal their lessons," he said, shaking his head. "As if anyone could just steal their whole curriculum with some study guides or something."

"That... That sounds like a classic problem we had to deal with at home," I said, sitting back on a crate, trying to ignore the rush of knowledge I was getting from finally finishing the sequencer. "When a gifted kid gets stuck in boring classes, they stop paying attention, and start doing average, or even fail, when they should be crushing it."

"Did you have that problem?" He asked, looking up at me.

"Me? No, this whole smart thing is a recent development if, you can imagine that," I said with a snort. "I was pretty much average all the way around, despite applying myself."

That got a laugh out of him, the young adult leaning back and sitting on his haunches. After a minute, he stood up, walking around the machine, poking at the buttons along the face, before turning to look at me.

"You got anything else to work on?"

I smirked and gestured to a second and third pile of parts.

"You're welcome to help," I responded. "I won't say no to free labor."

We hopped back to work, one of the MRVN units carrying the large sequencer, about the size of a decent dishwasher, out to one of the storage sheds. We started the next project much the same way the previous one had begun, starting small and building upwards. As we worked, I began explaining that this machine was my first attempt at creating a device that could raise a creature that normally grew in an egg, without requiring one.

It was crude, more of an exploration attempt into the subject than a serious machine. I could already see several ways to improve the system, and I was looking forward to increasing the size and actually getting my hands on a working model to start... well, to start playing god.

In a safe, non-megalomaniac way, of course.

About fifteen minutes into the new machine, I spot Gloria standing in the doorway. I had no idea how long she had been there, but given that she had a shade escort, I had nothing to worry about. I gave her a nod, which caught David's attention, who turned and greeted her with a hug, something that caught the older woman off guard, but she happily returned.

"Mom..."

"I know Mijo," she said, kissing the top of his head, before fixing me with a long look. "I meant every word of the threat I made yesterday. I'm going to hold you to your word."

"Good, you deserve nothing less," I assured her.

"...So where do I sign? You got a contract for me, or am I really just trusting you?" She asked, though the previous cutting tone was dulled by a softer edge.

"We can come up with a contract if you'd like," I responded. "But I'm hoping it won't be necessary for long, and that you will eventually trust me."

"I'll see what I can do."

I smiled and stepped closer, reaching out my hand, which Gloria took and shook with a tight grip. She clearly still had her muscles laced, judging by her grip. Either that, or she was even more of a badass than I thought.

Not long after the handshake, Jackie called me down to his apartment for breakfast. It was a light meal, consisting of just coffee, some fruit, and toast with butter and honey. Our guests were, of course, dumbfounded by the quality and taste, but I could tell that Jackie was distracted by the afternoon's salmon event. A quick peek into his fridge while helping him set the table revealed multiple trays of imitation fish, available in several different colors.

While we ate, we talked, with Kaytlyn, Jackie, Misty, Gloria, and David, enjoying the meal and conversation. Mama Welles had apparently returned home the previous night, while Misty had stayed the night with Jackie. Everyone was happy to hear that Gloria and David had agreed to join up, the group accepting them relatively easily. As breakfast started to wind down, Samwise arrived, carrying a pair of watches for Gloria and David.

"Alright, so these are our specially made beacons and comms units. As long as you are wearing these, we can teleport you here no matter where you are in *this plane of existence*, never mind the planet." I explained, the mother and son pair looking at me with wide eyes. "You can also make calls to any of us, with the same ridiculous range. With your permission, there is a simple chip injection that will let the devices scan your body, so that if you're injured and incapacitated, we can teleport you here anyway. Just keep the watch on you, because otherwise we can't reach you."

Gloria took the watch and examined it, while David looked at it with a raised eyebrow. After a moment, he pointed at it with his off hand.

"So... why not just implant the beacon part inside us?" David asked. "Wouldn't that be better than wearing it in something that could be stolen?"

"David, I'm sure he thought of-" Gloria started to say, nudging her son in the side, only for me to cut her off.

"Goddamn it," I said, rubbing my eyes as I realized he was one hundred percent correct. "No, he's right, how did I not see that?"

"I believe you were stuck trying to make a better Pip-Boy," Samwise pointed out. "That is where you got the idea, after all."

"...Fuck, you're right, Sam. Okay, we need to design a permanent implant, something we can set in bone without side effects... The capsule is small enough, and if we cover it with titanium, the bone should naturally adhere to it, maybe even subsume it."

"Perhaps you could add it in as extra for the regeneration implant you have, Sir," Smawise suggested. "It would fit inside it well, and the implant is relatively non-invasive. Plus, it is a potent addition to anyone's arsenal, even for those who aren't fighting."

"Not a bad suggestion," I admitted, looking over at Gloria and David. "It's an implant that goes right in your sternum. It's low-impact, and the result is a minor healing factor that keeps the body in top shape. Jackie has a military-grade sandbag that he can use nearly two dozen times in pretty quick succession now, thanks to some other bioware, and the next day, he is basically fit and ready to go."

"That is... Well, I would have said that wasn't possible," Gloria admitted with a frown. "But then you showed me your stimpaks, and well, my definition of that seems to need some reconsidering."

It's a handy little bit of cyberware. For those of us who prefer not to fry our nervous system, it could be installed as a simple quality of life thing." I explained, taping my sternum where my implant was. "No more swelling or bruising, no more sore joints. Pulled muscles are gone in a day, and broken bones heal in half the time. Of course, if you do something as serious as breaking a bone, we would use a stimpak, which reminds me..."

I trailed off as both Gloria and David were staring at me with wide eyes, the latter frozen with a peach chunk halfway to his mouth. I winced and nodded, raising my hands in surrender.

"Right, sorry. We can ease you into a lot of this stuff later," I assured them. "Bottom line is, we have a lot of bio and cyberware that is significantly more compatible with your body. No cyberpsychosis in this group."

"Right... well, I suppose we should consider that," she responded, sharing a look with Jackie, Misty, and Kaytlyn, the latter two of whom looked sympathetic. "For now, we have some moving to do... and I have a few phone calls I am very much looking forward to."

"Do yourself a favor and only bring your essentials and sentimental things," I said. "We can print you out everything from clothes to gadgets with the molly makers, at corpo level quality."

"That will make things easier," she agreed with a nod, before patting David on the back. "C'mon, Mijo, let's get this over with."

"Kaytlyn, would you mind...?"

"...Are you worried about something, Jay?" Kaytlyn asked with a frown. "They are just going to grab their stuff."

"Better safe than sorry," I responded with a shrug. "Besides, I want them to have a better vehicle, so show them one of our company cars."

"Right, okay, but you owe me," she said, mostly kidding, as she got up and followed the mother and son pair out of the apartment.

We watched them leave, the front door of Jackie's apartment sealing back up behind them. I took another bite of my toast, finishing it in one crunchy bite, before focusing back on Jackie and Misty.

"Alright... well, I'm going to get some work in," I said, standing from the table with a smile. "I have a feeling it's going to get busy over the next few days. You need any help with dinner?"

"No, Amelia will be lending a hand. She wants to get a feel for cooking so she can better manage the restaurant," he explained. "I'll have her and my heart to keep me company."

Jackie put his arm around Misty, who smiled and leaned against him, the larger man kissing her cheek with a big smile.

"Alright, I'll see you around then, have fun."

I made my way back up to the workshop, settling in for a few hours of building. Sable was set to arrive early in the afternoon, so I wanted to make as much progress as possible before that time. The fact that she specifically mentioned bringing wine meant I probably wasn't going to be doing any building later in the day. I just knew that Jackie would try to one-up her with his own cocktail creations.

I was still building around the edges of the large obscured area of the Jurassic tech tree, which was apparently much deeper and denser than I had first imagined. The DNA sequencer I built with David might have been impressive for even this world, but I could tell there were at *least* two more iterations to go.

Still, I was working through the early equipment quickly, my knowledge of the tech and how it worked steadily increasing. The progress was satisfying, and I was confident that I would be able to finish what I wanted from the tech tree ahead of my two-week schedule. Which was good, because this was going to be a hectic week even without the building.

I was halfway through my fifth machine, a rather crude but serviceable attempt at a robotic-enhanced microsurgery suite, when Murtaugh warned me that Sable was on her way.

She was the last guest we were waiting for, since not only had Gloria and David returned, laden with their personal effects, but Vik and Rebecca had also arrived while I was working.

After a few minutes, I stood from my latest work and dusted off my clothes, grabbing a rag to clean my hands as I made my way out of the garage. As I stepped out of the workshop through the side entrance, Sable's fancy car pulled in front of the workshop. As the [golden-eyed corpo](#) climbed out of her car, I noted that her white hair was pulled back in a braided ponytail, a new look for her. As she walked out to greet me, she stopped, raising an eye at me.

"What?" She asked, tilting her head as she tried to figure out what I was looking at. "Spit out, Jay."

"Going for something new," I said, gesturing to my head, her eyes shifting just slightly, widening a hair before she regained control. "I like it."

She let out a long breath, shaking her head slightly before walking around, shifting into the passenger side door to grab a large case in the seat. I waved a MRVN down from inside, and she backed up as the robot lifted the plastic box easily. As the robot moved, I could hear the soft clinking of full glass coming from inside the box. She thanked me, and we both followed the robot into the workshop and down the stairs.

"... my niece did it," She said as we walked, confusing me for a moment before I looked over at her, playing with her braid. "I forgot to undo it after I left."

"I wasn't kidding, it looks good," I repeated with a smile. "I didn't realize you had a niece."

"I do, my brother's daughter," She explained.

I could sense she wanted to drop the subject, so I nodded in understanding but stayed silent. Both of us stepped through the teleporter one at a time, following the MRVN.

It didn't take us long to make our way to Jackie's, which was more than a little chaotic, considering the large number of people inside. The only person in the know who wasn't available was Mama Welles, who apparently couldn't get away from the Coyote for the meal.

"Jackie, how much time do we have?" I asked, taking a seat at the large dining room table. "We have enough time to go over things?"

"Yeah, Jay, I'm running a little behind anyway," The larger, apron-clad man said, Amelia nodding in agreement from beside him. "I'll listen as best I can from here."

"Great. Sable?"

"Right."

Sable nodded, making her way to the plastic container she had arrived with, cracking it open. I was worried she had misunderstood what I wanted when she thankfully pulled out a thick folder and carried it back to the table. As I watched her, her entire demeanor changed, shifting from the slight openness she had started to show around us to full corpo businesswoman. Every move was clean and calculated, and her lips carried a confident smile just a hair short of a smirk. It was like seeing her again for the first time, when she had first come to the Ridge looking for clout and power.

"A short run down for those of you not entirely in the know," She said, walking around the room, carefully handing out sheets of fauxpaper, each a high detailed image of Watson, focused specifically on Northside. "Our goal is to perform a mass purchase of land in Northside. Funding is a combination of Jay's savings and my own investment. Now, as you can imagine, despite both of us being relatively wealthy, our money would only go so far while purchasing land in

Night City. So, to maximize the effectiveness of our money, we specifically targeted land occupied with Maelstrom gang sites."

The image she passed showed a relatively [large portion of Northside highlighted in green](#). It was an impressive chunk, considerably more than I thought we would be able to swing. I looked up at Sable, and I must have looked suitably impressed, as she winked before continuing to talk.

"Several contacts of mine have been working hard to wrangle as many deals as possible, locking them in to become public around the same time," She explained. "The land we have managed to negotiate for is highlighted in green."

"We own all of that?" David asked, his eyes wide. "That's like half of Watson!"

"Technically, Jay and I own it. Or will own it, once we start processing the purchases," Sable said, eyeing David and Gloria, before softening slightly. "But yes, we do. And it is closer to a fourth of Watson, unfortunately. There was only so much we could do."

"And I assume that processing these purchases is when the fireworks start?" I asked, and Sable nodded.

"It's certainly when everyone is going to start paying attention," she responded. "I'm not sure Maelstrom will care much. Not until you start evicting them. But everyone else will notice."

"What stopped you from buying these strips?" Vik asked, squinting through his glasses at the image.

"Right. You'll notice that we were unable to purchase the area as a solid, single block," Sable admitted, nodding to Vik. "The water plant was untouchable for obvious reasons, but the large cluster of buildings between the drydock and the warehouse district is a Biotechnica group. The other unpurchased areas are either owned by people too stubborn to pass their land for cheap, or owned by the city, and therefore not open to negotiations."

"Even with those strips, it's still very impressive, Sable, well done," I said, genuinely impressed. "I never thought we would be able to buy this much at once. We can address the issues with Biotechnica and the city-owned space in due time, once our funds have had a bit more time to recover. Until then, we can focus on building up and improving our new cut of Night City."