

Gloria left quickly after her promise of bodily harm should I fuck around, and I was gone not long after that. I stopped by Sable's office to tell her that Jackie would be cooking his fish spread the following day. She responded by agreeing to bring the purchasing plan for Northside sometime that afternoon. She looked excited by the invitation and offered to bring some wine with her, both to drink and to share with Frank. I gladly accepted on Jackie's behalf, mostly because I was interested in seeing what Corpo wine tasted like and whether it compared to what I would occasionally drink back home.

After saying goodbye, Riggs and I headed directly home, shooting a couple of messages to warn people that we would be having guests. Jackie assured me he had plenty of food ready. Apparently, he was working on trying out some of the starter food for the Nomad restaurant and testing grounds, and there was going to be plenty to go around, especially since Vik and Rebecca couldn't make it.

Other than that, there wasn't much else we could do but wait. Once I was home at Rocky Ridge, I changed out of my bio-doppelganger, and got dressed in some simple work clothes. To make the most of the hour, I first did a bit of prep work, gathering a few things around the workshop to show off to Gloria and David. When I was done with that, I helped Samwise and his MRVNs assemble the advanced, upgraded version of the Fallout power armor I had designed for the Nomads. They had selected that as their reward, and Samwise had already delivered two of them.

About forty minutes after I arrived, halfway through assembling the fourth set of power armor, I got a message from Murtaugh saying we had an incoming vehicle, an old yellow [Thorton Gelena](#). After telling him to keep the weapons off of them, I made my way out of the garage, wiping my hands with a rag as I went. Just a few minutes later, the beat-up vehicle pulled into the town slowly, parking in front of the workshop. A moment later, Gloria and her son climbed out. Gloria was now wearing her iconic EMT jacket, most likely out of habit, while David was wearing an Arasaka school uniform. I sent Murtaugh a quick mental message to focus a scan on the teenager, just in case there was a tracker or something else woven into the black and red outfit.

"Gloria, good to see you again," I said with a smile, extending my hand to shake hers. "And you must be David, good to meet you as well."

David said nothing, looking around with a raised eyebrow, trying to hide a clear interest in the robots that were walking around. Riggs was leaning against the front of the workshop, back in his power armor, and the kid had to tear his eyes away from him as well.

"Jackson, gotta say I didn't expect to see you in working clothes," The older woman admitted. "What's with the costume change?"

"I was just working on something in the shop, fancy suits tend to get in the way of that," I pointed out with a smirk. "Besides, the corpo look is just to fit the part when I need to. If you think today's suit was bad, you should have seen what I wore when Sable was showing me off to the corpos who buy from us."

"So... what were you working on?" David asked, trying to peer through the side door of the workshop. Gloria gave him a look, but I only chuckled.

"Come in and take a look," I offered, nodding towards the door before leading the pair inside.

I stepped inside the garage, turning left into the workshop. Most of the MRVNs had moved back to the production room to clear some space and reduce the number of distractions for the mother and son. As the two stepped into my domain, I gestured to the half-assembled power armor.

"This is a simpler, technically inferior version of the power armor I showed you earlier, Gloria," I explained, walking around the legs and half-assembled torso. "It's being built for the Nomads who are living further in the town."

"Nomads?" Gloria asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Why is it inferior?" David asked, just as his mother asked about our neighbors.

"We had a lot of extra space, and we needed more people around to provide a sort of cover against prying eyes and infiltration," I explained to Gloria. "They get the safety of walls and security of living on land they have permission to be on, while I get covered and a workforce willing to take gigs. As for why this armor is 'inferior', it's designed to be easily serviceable. It might not outdo my standard power armor, but just about any mechanic with the right tools could repair it with handcrafted parts. And that's a huge advantage when you're traveling all over the badlands, trying to be as self-sufficient as possible."

David stepped forward, nodding in understanding. He reached out and touched an exposed portion of the power armor frame, giving it a good tug while I continued to talk.

"A high-powered military borg would make quick work of them, but they should turn just about anyone into a rocking socking tank," I explained. "Plus, they can wield heavy weapons as easily as we might pull a pistol, which makes them great for defending a position."

"Nova," David said, prompting a smirk from me and an eyeroll from Gloria. "Could I-"

"Absolutely not," Gloria said, cutting him off, giving me a hard look. "The power armor is interesting, and your robots look advanced, but neither of those are really anything new. If you're trying to impress me..."

"Alright, alright. If you want to be impressed, I suppose we can start with this," I said, reaching to my hip, where my secret stash of modified [stimpaks](#) was. "These are stimpak, and they are why I was so confident that your medical skills would mostly be for civilians. These handy little injections are more effective than the most powerful and expensive medical nanites available, which, as I'm sure you know, can be effective, but are extremely limited. These are not."

"That's... a pretty big claim," Gloria said, crossing her arms. "You expect me to just believe that?"

"Of course not," I said with a snort, grabbing a prepared tablet, which showed off the tail end of my last bioware installation, and handing it to her. "This is the stimpak injection being used in some recent surgery.

She accepted the tablet and pressed play, David watching from beside her with interest. Even if I couldn't see the screen, I could tell precisely when Vik started injecting the stimpaks, as Gloria's eyes went wide as she watched.

"What sort of side effects are there?" She asked, rewinding the footage to watch again. "How much trauma can a single injection repair?"

"Well, using too many at once can lead to some serious dehydration and rapid nutritional issues. Basically, drink some water and have a heavy snack and you're fine," I explained, holding back a laugh as her jaw dropped again. "As for its limitations, that was a serious bioware implantation, and it only required around four stimpaks. In all honesty, it could have taken less."

"This... Dios Mio, this would change everything," Gloria said. "The medical industry alone..."

"To be fair, it does not fix viral infections, genetic disorders, deformations, fungal infections, parasites, or pretty much anything beyond physical trauma," I pointed out. "The medical industry would take a hit, but it would survive."

"...Why would you need me if you have this?" She asked, slowly handing me the tablet. "What could a slightly overqualified EMT do that this can't?"

"While we are planning on revealing some of our tech in the coming weeks, there is still plenty I am not prepared to reveal, and this is one of them," I explained, wiggling the clip of injectors. "Someday, I want stimpaks to be as common as band-aids. I want every first aid kit to have them, I want them in every emergency kit, in every teacher's desk, and in every briefcase. I want parents to roll their eyes and tease their kids when they use mini-paks to fix paper cuts and stubbed toes."

I let the idea float for a moment before frowning and shaking my head.

"Unfortunately, we are not prepared for the blowback of releasing these publicly. I would love nothing more than to drive through Night City and release these by the hundreds, just handing them out to anyone who wants them," I assured them both. "But if I did, Biotechnia and a dozen other companies would be on our ass by the end of the day, with intent to kill. Someday, eventually, that won't even phase me. But for now, these need to stay internal, because if they get out and I get offed, then this and all the other good I can do for the world would be dead with me."

The wonder in both of their eyes dimmed as I pointed out just what releasing the stimpaks would do. It was a little heartbreaking to see such hope dragged down by realistic dangers, but it was important that they both understood the dangers and stakes involved.

"You've got more?" David asked, his mom too distracted to stop him. "What could you have that's bigger than a miracle drug?"

"One thing you'll learn about Jay is that doubting him is pointless and gets old quickly," Jackie said, stepping into the workshop, catching my two guests off guard. "Sorry, didn't mean to startle you, Ma'am, Chavo. Just wanted to warn you that dinner will be ready in about forty-five minutes, down in my apartment."

"Thank you, Jackie," I said with a smile. "We'll get there eventually."

He gave me a joking salute, and my two guests a wave and a nod, before heading out of the building. David watched him go with wide eyes, and something in his expression told me that Jackie had just found a fan. I smirked but gestured back to my counter, where I had a few other things ready to show off.

"This is something I think you'll like, Gloria. We will likely end up adding it or a version of it into your standard kit," I explained, picking up one of the hand scanners from Titanfall, basically a portable MRI machine.

I handed the device to her, showing her how it worked. She scanned David and then herself, which turned out to be a mistake, as she apparently still had a few of her old bits of cyberware left. Nothing major, nothing that would have really saved her from, say, a car accident, but enough to surprise the hell out of David, who had no idea how much of a badass his mom used to be.

I showed off a few more things, the last of which was a small portable shield barrier that Samwise put together, primarily for demonstration purposes. I was *still* counting down the days that I could add energy shields to a good deal of what I made, from my robots to my vehicles and even my buildings, but unfortunately, that was still up there with teleportation and stimpaks. It was too advanced and we were still too small.

When I was done easing them into some of the crazier ideas, including having "cracked" fusion energy, I led them down into the basement of the workshop, otherwise known as the teleporter room.

"Alright, this is, by far, the most important discovery I have made so far. Not just because of its own usefulness, but because in the process of creating it, I basically revolutionized communications in the process," I explained. "This one invention will shake the absolute foundations of almost every aspect of business. I give you..."

I gestured to the teleport platform as if I were presenting them with a magic trick, which, to them, I probably was. A moment after I did, Riggs was teleported to the platform, appearing there in all his glory.

"Teleportation!" I said with a smile. "Clean, safe, completely without limits, and instantaneous. No molecular disassembly required, just step on the platform, press a button, and suddenly you are somewhere else."

We stood there, Riggs and I, in silence for nearly a minute as Gloria and David stared at Riggs with hanging jaws and wide eyes. After a minute passed, Riggs let out a grunt, reached forward, and tapped the platform's controls. A split second later, the teleporter took him away again. That seemed to be enough to finally crack the pair free of their shock.

"Teleportation? Are you serious?" David asked, taking a single step toward the platform, only for Gloria to snag his arm and hold him back. "How does it work?"

"By utilizing entangled photons, which stay connected no matter the distance between them, I can basically cut reality open, slipping us through the ensuing bubble. The process requires a catching teleporter, so I can't just send someone off to a random location, but I can pull anyone in who is carrying one half of a pair of entangled photons," I explained, holding up the small capsule that contained one of said photons. "I can also teleport someone to and from more permanent spots like this. You end up juggling a whole lot of photon capsules, but it works."

"And it's safe?" Gloria asked, watching as I walked up the stairs.

"Absolutely. I've already used it several hundred times at this point, with zero side effects," I responded, shrugging my shoulders. "It's perfectly safe. Just watch!"

I hopped onto the platform, tapping on the control stand, and a second later, I was standing in the vault. I did a quick count to five and activated the platform again, and once again, I was standing in front of my guests. They were obviously stunned, struggling to wrap their minds around what they had seen, which was honestly not a surprise.

"That's pretty preem, but what's that gotta do with mom working for you?" David asked, being the first of the two to recover.

"Mijo..."

"Oh, all this showing off has nothing to do with your mom, it has to do with you," I explained, tapping on his chest as I stepped down the stairs.

"What do you mean?" He asked, looking back at Gloria for a moment before focusing back on me.

"I could have hired your mom with a big enough paycheck alone," I explained. "The problem was that she would never do anything to put you and your education at risk, which joining us would have done, since we are bound to piss off all sorts of corporations, including Arasaka. She is doing her best to give you a solid chance to escape the bullshit of Night City. All of this is to show her that we are so far beyond all of it, the companies, the gangs, and the edgerunner crap. We're the big leagues, kid, which is exactly where your mom wanted you to be."

Something about my explanation shook the older woman free of whatever spiralling thoughts she was locked into. Suddenly, her expression shifted from one of uncertainty and shock to a more serious and determined look. She climbed up the steps, reaching over and grabbing my shirt, pulling me down roughly until she could look directly into my eyes.

As she moved aggressively, several panels along the wall behind her opened up, just below the ceiling. Each panel revealed security turrets of various types, a half dozen of them, all of them zeroing in on Gloria. Luckily, neither she nor David spotted them, so when I sent a message to Murtaugh to calm down, they disappeared a second later, with the two guests none the wiser.

"Look me in the eye and tell me you'll do right by my little Mijo," she said, eyes locked on mine, ignoring David as he asked what she was doing. "Push or pull, you make sure he gets the best."

"If you join us, you get the same benefits as everyone else. You'll be family, and that means we all take care of each other," I assured her, looking right back into her eyes. "David will get the same opportunities to thrive as anyone else I consider to be family. As will you."

It might not have been delivered in the best way, but thankfully, my sincerity seemed to get through to her, and she released my shirt, dusting it off slightly to work out the wrinkles. She then stepped back and looked over at the control panel for the teleporter.

"Right... well, you have a teleporter. Why show us this?" She asked. "Is there something on the other side?"

"Yeah, it's where our employee housing is," I explained with a smile. "Miles and miles away from Night City, completely safe from any sort of retaliation for what we are doing."

"Alright... well, if you're coming with us, I suppose I can trust that it's safe," She said with a nod. "Do we need to go one at a time or...?"

I explained the safety protocols for the teleporter, which were relatively simple since the system was generally safe. Once we were done, I stepped through first, followed by Gloria and David. As we left the landing room and stepped into the vault proper, I couldn't help but smile as I gestured to the interior of the center courtyard. Looking up, the artificial sky was clear, with the sun slowly setting and the moon already in the sky.

"This... are we underground?" David asked, looking up at the ceiling and along the walls.

"That's right, welcome to the vault," I explained with a smile, gesturing around us. "A completely self-sufficient bunker well outside the range of Night City, buried deep underground. Not even the most powerful nuclear weapons have a chance of getting this deep, as every layer has been reinforced and hardened against attack. Of course, considering there are no entrances or exits on the surface, they would have to find us first."

"It's... a little plain," Gloria commented, looking at the floor around us, which was a mix of gravel and dirt. "The ceiling is amazing, but..."

"The plan is to plant flowers and grass in the dirt," I explained with a chuckle. "We are just trying to work out the best way to acquire the necessary seeds and bulbs. Hopefully, it will be sooner rather than later. I miss having greenery around."

I looked around with them, before checking the time on my internal HUD.

"Well, dinner should be ready in about fifteen minutes," I warned them. "We could take a peek into what your new home would look like, or we can head to Jackie's apartment early and check out the apartment later."

"I think... some time to think about what we have seen would be nice," Gloria said, overriding David, who clearly wanted to check out the apartment. "Are you sure it's okay to bother your friend for dinner?"

"Jackie has recently discovered a love for cooking. He would like nothing more than to hear your opinions on his food," I assured her, guiding them through the underground courtyard. "Today, we are trying some of his test recipes for his first restaurant, which, technically, is also a test for when we open up a proper spot in the city."

We stopped in front of Jackie's apartment, the door blinking as a doorbell played inside. If I had just touched the door, something the security system would recognize as an override request, the door would have opened for us, but there was no reason to be rude. A few seconds later, the door opened smoothly, allowing us to step inside. Jackie's apartment was a lot more traditional than mine, even though the bottom floor was mostly just a kitchen and a large dining room.

As we entered, I was surprised to see that Misty and Mama Welles were both there, along with Kaytlyn, Riggs, Samwise, and Murtaugh, though the latter was quite focused on his tablet. There was also a woman I didn't recognize working with Jackie in the kitchen.

"Misty, Mama Welles, I didn't know you were coming," I said, getting a hug from them both, before looking over at Jackie.

"Jackie needed more people to taste his food," Misty said. "I think Vik almost cried when he realized he was too busy to come."

"Maybe we can pack him and Rebecca up a doggy bag of leftovers," I suggested, before turning to gesture to my two tag-alongs. "This is Gloria and David Martinez. I'm hoping to hire them into the family soon. They're joining us for dinner."

"Oh, the more the merrier," Mama Welles said, walking over to shake Gloria's hand. "Welcome."

I let them mingle a bit before stepping aside to make my way to the countertop bar that ran along the kitchen. Jackie nodded while turning over something in a pan as I sat down, while I purposely tried not to pay attention so it could be more of a surprise.

"Hey Jackie, who's your friend?" I asked, adjusting my stool a bit.

"This is Amelia," he said with a smile. "My assistant... or my manager or something. Jury is still out on what her title is."

"Greetings, Sir," the woman said, bowing to me slightly. "I suppose you would not recognize me, but you created me to assist Jackie Welles in creating a restaurant, as well as potentially running other locations, should I prove sufficient. Please, call me Amelia."

The woman, whom I had already assumed was our newest AI member, covered in their liquid skin, smiled as she stood up straight. She had black hair and facial features that resembled those of [Nora Lum](#), though she was a bit older than I remembered her to be before I came here.

"Good to finally meet you properly, Amelia," I said with a smile. "How are you feeling?"

"I am doing well. Jackie and Samwise have been kind in helping me self-actualize to a degree," She said. "Samwise explained it will be an ongoing process."

"Yes, as your systems settle and you grow, your personality will stabilize into something more unique," I confirmed. "Your personality matrix is pretty advanced compared to Samwise, since you'll be interacting directly with people frequently. Just let it happen, and it will be fine."

"Thank you for your advice," She said with a nod.

"You've met my assistant, now go sit down before my mom chats your guest's ears off," Jackie said with a joking dismissal. "Food will be out in a few."

I nodded and stood from the counter, moving to sit down at the dining table. I poured myself a glass of juice, followed by two glasses for Gloria and David, before very deliberately not taking a sip of mine, wanting to enjoy the show. Neither of our guests seemed to notice we were waiting for them to drink, before both of them went wide-eyed, David almost spilling his in the process. The group chuckled as they recovered, and I leaned forward to explain.

"One of our... favorite advancements is the process of creating food that is nearly identical to the original," I explained. "Beef, pork, onions, cheese, all sorts of meats, vegetables, and fruits, including... What's the juice, Jackie?"

"Strawberry, peach, and lemon," He responded, still looking down at the stove top. "Frank and I are working on a way to make drinks directly, rather than making the ingredients and finishing them by hand. How's it taste?"

"I wouldn't have been able to tell anything was different," I responded, a sentiment quickly shared by the others. "Anyway, this artificial food is safer, healthier, and tastes better."

"It also purifies your spirit," Misty assured us. "I'm not sure what it is, but it has a positive effect on your aura."

David gave her a sceptical look, but I shot it down.

"Judge all you want, but take it from me, David, don't dismiss those kinds of things off-hand," I cautioned him. "Some of the stuff techniques she talks about are thousands of years old. Things don't survive that long unless there is something to them."

Of course, I was also cheating. Knowledge of other worlds meant that, ostensibly, worlds with magic, souls, chi, aura, and more existed. Hell, according to the entities that shoved me here, my soul was part of the transfer, part of what made me not just a copy of the original. It was mind-bending stuff, but living it made it difficult not to show a bit more respect for things I would have snorted and dismissed in my old life.

But David didn't know that, so as teens usually do, he dismissed my words, instead focusing back on his drink, taking another long sip.

Eventually, as we were talking about the drinks and their effects on your well-being, Jackie brought over several trays of food. First, there were a few different types of cheesy fries, some with melted cheese, some with a cheese sauce, as well as various types of meats. We each got small portions, Jackie serving us from a trolley, before nervously waiting for our responses. Gloria and David were more or less useless, unable to form sentences beyond "Dios Mio" and "What the fuck?" We eventually settled on cheese sauce with spiced ground beef and bacon, as it was one of the tastiest options. On top of that, while it was definitely messy, it was the easiest to eat, allowing you to hold the serving container in one hand while eating with the other.

The melted cheese bound things together too much, meaning you needed a knife and fork to eat it, while the chicken was impossible to spread evenly in each bite.

Over the next few hours, we tried dozens of different dishes, from hot dogs slathered in chili to scoops of ice cream with various fruits inside, giving Jackie notes about everything along the way. I was honestly surprised by what Jackie had come up with, between the sheer amount and variety. I was also feeling bad that I hadn't invited Sable, even if she was coming over for dinner the next day, for Jackie's first experiments with salmon.

When we finally finished, it was much later than I assumed it would be, so we invited Gloria and David to stay the night, showing them to one of the spare apartments. Both of them were feeling the effects of the large meal, so while the house tour was short, both of them got plenty of enjoyment out of the large, comfortable beds.

After showing them to their rooms, I made my way to my own room, before spending a few hours working out some machines from my tech tree, specifically another more advanced version of the DNA sequencer, as well as the first bits of equipment for ectogenesis, or the complete artificial carrying of a living creature. It was crude and mostly experimental, but I was looking forward to what that tech led to further down the branch.

After I finished copying the designs for the machines, I crawled into bed, with plans to finish the machines the following morning. As I watched the shifting stars through one of the higher windows, it didn't take me long to finally fall asleep.

