

The following morning, a pair of my soldiers woke me up for my watch. As we traded places, another pair of my soldiers joined me as I headed out into the hall. Once I was done waking up and looking around for a bit, I assigned one of the soldiers to watch the transition to the metro itself, while I headed up the stairway to the surface to take a look around. After taking a moment to listen, I slowly and quietly climbed the stairs, going just far enough to poke my head out.

It was still early, the air heavy with wet morning chill, and I could see the sun reflecting off the broken windows that filled the buildings around us. As far as I could tell, the streets were empty and quiet. I was tempted to step onto the streets and maybe poke around at the nearest building, but I stamped that out and headed back down, assigning a soldier to stand by the underground entrance to keep an eye on it.

With the surface cleared, I walked around the tunnel, stopping just a few dozen feet away from the entrance into the metro proper. Again, I was tempted to explore, but ultimately stuck inside the smaller tunnel.

To pass the time, I started investigating the various things inside the tunnel itself. I pried open a few lockers, but only found junk and old dusty clothes. Then I set my sights on one of the [Nuka-Cola vending machines](#) standing against the wall.

The large, rectangular, red-and-white machines were a head taller than I was and covered in dents, dust, and dirt. Despite clearly being unpowered, the name plate still flickered and glowed, making me think it had some sort of recycling fusion cell inside, just enough to keep it lit. I could see a few Nuka-Cola inside, including a pair of broken glasses with their sticky contents spilled and dried along the bottom two trays.

I tried for a moment to be fancy and maybe unscrew something using my knife, but eventually I gave up and used it for leverage instead, prying open a panel just enough to get my fingers in. Then, with a yank, I tore the panel off, revealing the inner mechanics. After a bit of studying the internals, I managed to spot the mechanism for opening the door, which was normally used to feed the machine more drinks. I carefully reached inside, fumbling around a bit as I tried to find the mechanism without being able to see it, now that my arm was stuffed inside it.

I was curious just how the Coca-Cola parody tasted.

"Impressive, never seen anyone do that without a prybar."

I jerk my hand inside the machine, startled by the voice behind me. I slam my knuckles on some of the internal machining, yanking my arm out with a hiss. Nothing was broken, not even the skin, but it smarted like a bastard. I turned, rubbing my knuckles to find Sarah standing there, holding her laser rifle by her side, looking at me with a raised eyebrow. She was still in her undersuit, orange and grey, which was why I hadn't heard her sneak up on me.

"I think I prefer you in the armor," I said, giving her a half-hearted glare.

She let out a huff of laughter as I turned back to the machine, reaching back inside to pry the door open. Once I released the locking mechanism, I pulled back to see the exposed drinks, and I reached in and pulled out the cleanest pair. I turned the [glass bottles](#) over in my hands, rubbing my thumb over the label. They were a bit dusty, but the dark liquid inside was free of floating debris, and the seals looked intact. After my inspection didn't turn up anything concerning, I turned around to hand Sarah one of the drinks. She took it, looking down at it for a moment, before stopping me from twisting off the top of mine.

"Wait, hold on a second," she said, reaching out and taking the drink from me. "You'll like this."

She looked around for a moment, spotting the nearby lockers. She walked over, grabbed a bunch of clothes, and pulled them out, shaking them to get the dust off. She then walked back to the machine, put some of the clothes into the cavity exposed when I tore off the panel, then the drinks, then another layer of clothes. She reached back her hand while still looking inside the machine.

"Can I see your knife?" She asked, and after a moment, I placed it in her hand.

Another minute of fiddling, she stood up straight with one of her hands and the knife still inside the machine. Then she looked away like something was going to pop.

With a yank, she cut something, and a gush of white gas exploded out of the open panel and several other cracks and seams. Sarah jerked her hand back, shaking it a bit. She then handed my knife back to me before rubbing her hands together to warm them up. Despite the effect, she was smiling, so she must have intended for that to happen. More white gas flowed out of the machine, sinking to the ground.

"Some sort of compressor inside the machine will sometimes keep a liquid inside it. I think it's nitrogen?" She explained, shrugging her uncertainty away. "Any way, you cut the line, and it sprays out. If you're smart..."

She waited a few more seconds, before reaching inside and grabbing the bundle of cloth, which was now so cold it was stiff. She pried it open and passed me my drink back.

Which was now nice and frosty.

"Huh, that's pretty cool," I said, accepting the now-chilled drink. "Where did you learn that?"

"One of my old mentors taught me," she explained. "Said his mentor taught him."

I nodded in appreciation before popping the top of my drink, and as surreptitiously as possible, took a sniff of the open bottle. It smelled fine, and whatever gas that had been sprayed was odorless, which lent to the fact that it was nitrogen.

After waving my Geiger counter over the bottle, getting an eye roll from Sarah as I did, I took a small sip, letting the dark liquid roll over my tongue. The taste was good, unique, not

quite Cola, but not quite... not. As best I could describe it, it tasted like a more cola-forward Dr. Pepper, with a deeper spice and citrus twist. I had always loved Dr. Pepper, so this was pretty good.

It was also completely flat, with not even the barest hint of carbonation. It wasn't bad, though, especially since it was ice cold, though the lack of carbonation definitely cut down on how crisp and refreshing it was. It felt like I could chug the whole bottle like it was nothing, even with its temperature.

"A bit early for sweet drinks, but not bad," I commented, before adding. "Never had a cold Nuka in the field before."

"Hey, you're the one who went hunting for it," Sarah pointed out, and I simply shrugged in response.

As we enjoyed our beverage, we settled on sitting on a bench at the [corner of the tunnel](#), which gave me a good view of the entry stairs and the opening that led to the metro tunnel. Both of my soldiers were closer to each of the entrances, watching them closely as I watched them both.

"So Elder Lyons wanted me to try and find out why you picked the Capital Wasteland," Sarah mentioned casually. "He's worried you have ulterior motives."

"I had no say in coming here," I said truthfully. "This is the spot that was chosen for me, so here I am."

"The plight of the soldier," Sarah said, tipping her bottle to me.

"True. That said, if I had to venture a guess... I would say it's likely due to how populated the area is," I added after a few minutes. "Plus the Potomac, and the potential for interesting finds both in the city and around it... It's a hotspot, and I'm getting the sense that they were interested in putting someone here to capitalize on it."

"So no specific goals?" She asked, shrugging when I gave her a look. "Hey, don't look at me. I came right out and asked, Dad wanted me to see if I could get you or your soldiers to admit something."

I rolled my eyes, taking another sip of the Nuka-Cola. I was glad that she had come out and asked, but I couldn't exactly blame Elder Lyons for being suspicious, or at least cautious. For all he knew, we were the next [Talon Company](#), and were just biding our time, looking for the best time to strike.

We stayed at the bench, chatting and keeping an eye on the entrances, until it was time to get moving. I poked everyone awake, the first soldiers up, heading out to the camels to grab the morning rations and distribute them to everyone. At this point, we were down by about half our rations, which meant that we would likely need to buy some supplies, but with any luck, we would only need to eat them for a meal or two, though we would have to live off food from Rivet City while we were stationed there for a day.

When it was finally time to set off, we carefully entered the metro first, just to confirm that nothing else had moved in while we were asleep. This was the first time I was stepping into the open area, and I was surprised by what I found. The room expanded immediately into a large space, where [we were on a raised platform](#), and the tracks were underneath us. Considering how small an entrance it had been, I was surprised by the scale of the actual connection space.

Once we had cleared the room, we carefully led the camels into the platform and then down a set of broken escalators. Once everyone was down, I spoke to the group to confirm the plan for traveling underground. Since our voices were echoing to a ridiculous level, I whispered quietly.

"We are going to break the groups into two, with Walters in the back and Sarah in the front," I said, gesturing further into the tunnel. "We will be traveling that way, with me and Carlos in front and Johnson leading the back. According to intel, the tunnel in the opposite direction has collapsed, so threats from behind should be minimal. But we can't leave it open, so we will have five in the back, seven in the front, and two soldiers keeping track of the camels. They should be able to follow along on flat ground, so we will be able to keep people in front and back without slowing down too much. Questions?"

When everyone shook their heads, I nodded, and we quickly split up, leading the camels onto the track and starting our trek through the tunnels.

Slowly but surely, we moved, navigating with mostly flashlights, though there were the occasional long-term emergency lights that dotted the ceiling. It was slow going, but steadily we crossed under the river. Twice we had to pass around commuter subway trains, and twice we had to help the camels make their way through debris.

Then, finally, we arrived, stopping by an opening in the side of the subway with a wide. It was a small recessed doorway cut into the subway wall, with a heavy-duty security door, and a platform raised from the tracks by a good two feet. Thankfully, there was a cobbled-together ramp welded and hammered into place, so we could guide the camels up and our.

Once we were ready, we carefully guided the camels up and through the large security doors. The room on the other side was some sort of monitoring station, but it was pretty wide, which made me think it doubled as a maintenance station as well. When we passed through the first room, we found the ramp up and, after following the doubling-back set of ramps, the surface. The process had taken longer than the actual trip through the tunnels, as we needed to keep the camel's heads down, making everything more difficult, as when you pulled them forward, they would raise their heads.

I was pretty sure my next upgrade for them would be another control upgrade. I was hoping it would allow them to take verbal commands, which would make directing them through cramped spaces significantly easier.

Eventually, finally, after what felt like half a day but was really just a little under three hours, we stepped out of the emergency access door along the side of a bridge. The door was camouflaged by a few burnt-out car wrecks, but with Walters and Sarah doing the heavy lifting,

they were quickly moved out of the way so we could leave. They then pushed them back, and we took a much-needed break.

While the process had been slow and simple, being in the dark, trapped underground, sealed in the tunnels with barely any light, weighed heavily on you. When the moment passed and the weight was gone, it left all of us feeling exhausted. To recuperate and recover from the effect, we took a long water break, which my soldiers appreciated. When we were ready, we quickly collected ourselves and mounted our camels.

"We should only be an hour or so away from Rivet City," Sarah revealed. "You realize you're going to attract a lot of attention, right? There is a decent grouping of scientists settled in the city, and they will want to take a look at your robots."

"And we are no more likely to let them do anything other than look than we were the Brotherhood," I responded. "But I don't think it will be a problem. We will leave people with them, no matter where we end up leaving them. It's one of the reasons we brought so many people."

"That and the supermutants," Johnson pointed out.

"Yeah, but that's kind of a given."

With the subway behind us, we slowly pushed forward through the city. The buildings were noticeably more dense on this side of the river, buildings towering over us on either side. I had been through cities before, walked the streets of Boston and New York, and at the time, I had been impressed by the buildings in a man's triumph over physics kind of way. Now, standing in the ruins of DC, it all felt completely different. Every window could hold a threat, every chunk of rubble could be a cover for an ambush.

Needless to say, I was very glad when we found the river again and began following along it, the sky opening up, at least on that side.

I was even happier to find how close we were to Rivet City, the massive settlement just a short walk away.