

We stopped for the night two hours later, the sun starting to set over the horizon as we started looking for a place to settle in. We likely could have pushed for another hour or so, but we were making such good time that it felt better to give our people a break, just in case we needed to double time it later.

It appeared that we had overestimated how long it would take by at least a day or two, but I was much happier to have overestimated our speed, rather than underestimated it.

Once we decided to settle in for the night, we slowed down considerably as we inspected the buildings along the road. The concentration of buildings was much lower on this side of the river, which was one of the reasons I had decided to stick to it and cross later, rather than vice versa. Unfortunately, this also meant that our options for resting spots were a bit more scarce, but thankfully, we eventually found a suitable location. It was a decent-sized building that had either been unfinished, stripped for materials, or had been built from subpar materials in the first place, as all that remained [was its concrete frame](#).

After a quick study of its foundation and pillars to make sure it wasn't going to come down on all of us, we climbed up five floors. It was slow going, as we were guiding the camels up one of the interior stairwells, one by one. While it was certainly an interesting process, the camels were too important to leave alone on the bottom floor, and since my people were more important to leave in the open and I wanted to give ourselves a height advantage, they needed to come up with us.

Johnson was quick to point out that being so high and bringing the camels up with us removed any chance of a quick retreat, but I assured him that if it came down to that, we would abandon the camels and retreat without them. It was still a gamble between having a strategic position and an easy escape path, but at least I was aware of what I was selecting.

Once the camels were up with us, we gathered them around in a large circle before letting them sit down and turn off for the day. They had about an hour of active time left, so if we needed them, we could activate them and leave, but for now, they would make good cover as we slept.

There were also some walls dotted around and inside the concrete skeleton of a building, and since we were high up enough that people passing by wouldn't be able to see us, we were actually pretty well protected, especially since we would be sleeping inside the circle of camels. Not only would they break up sightlines, but they would also help retain heat.

Again, the camels might be important, but the safety of my people was much more so.

Once the camels were in place, Johnson and I led two groups of three out into the surrounding buildings, quietly and quickly investigating them to make sure we hadn't accidentally set up shop near anything dangerous. Thankfully, beyond killing a couple of rad roaches, the buildings were empty. Well, they were empty of anything dangerous, as we did actually stumble into a partially intact shop, which had a small pharmacy in the back. Not much

had survived, but there was enough medical junk to fill at least two duffel bags for scrapping, probably closer to three. We would *definitely* be coming back for it on the return trip.

Beyond clearing the neighboring buildings, we were also gathering burnable materials. The nights were starting to get just on the uncomfortable side in terms of temperature, and a small fire would help keep the chill away.

Again, the thought of what winter in the wasteland was sticking in my brain. I resolved to ask some of the natives how bad it would get in the winter so we could better prepare for it.

When we returned from our patrol, Johnson rather expertly built a smokeless fire pit with old chunks of concrete and bricks, and explained the process as he did. When he was done, he lit the fire with his lighter before stacking the wood around to dry. After that, we settled around to eat our dinner, talking quietly to pass the time.

"You know... these things need a name," Carlos said, patting the deactivated robot he was leaning against.

"I don't want people getting attached to them, honestly," I admitted with a frown. "They are tools. If people start naming them, they won't send them off covered in C4 to blow up an enemy camp or something."

"...That's one hell of an image, Sir, but I meant for them in general," Carlos responded. "Something like Robocamels..."

I snorted, shaking my head, assuming he was joking. Unfortunately, he clearly wasn't, and the conversation spread among the other soldiers. Together, they came up with several names, though none of them really stuck.

"Or we could just call them... Camels?" I said, gesturing in confusion. "Hell, most people alive these days don't even know what a camel is, for all they know, that's what you call robots like this."

"Who called the fun police?" Carlos said jokingly, so I threw a crumpled bag of trash at him, which got a laugh from the group, including me.

Once we were done eating, it was time to set up the watches. I wanted at least two people up and awake at all times, scanning the area and making sure we didn't get snuck up on by a wandering super mutant or some other abomination I had somehow forgotten about. Thankfully, we had enough time to include the two extra hours of sleep needed to make sure everyone got eight hours in total, even if most people had it broken into two chunks.

I volunteered to take the worst watch, the one in the middle, but was overruled to take one of the uninterrupted ones, the final watch before we left, with Carlos joining me.

With the rotations set up, most of us went to sleep, with Johnson and one of his soldiers taking the first watch. They ended up going up a floor so they could walk around and even talk

quietly without disturbing us. The rest of us set up some temporary beds, using whatever we could to get comfortable.

I made a mental note to look into the HQ options to see if there was anything we could buy for easily transportable traveling comforts. Bringing pillows with wasn't on the table, but if the HQ had some sort of compactable foam bricks or something, I would consider it.

The night passed quickly, and thankfully, despite my fears, without incident. Even as Carlos and I woke up and headed upstairs for our own shift, the area was quiet, save for the occasional sound of shifting rubble and very distant gunfire.

"This place looks like crap..." Carlos said as we looked out away from DC, towards the more open wastes. "Do you think there is a chance it might ever recover?"

"Well... honestly, we are likely the best chance of that happening," I said with a frown. "The real question is whether the soil is capable of sustaining things like plants and trees. If it is, well, the Horizon world is the perfect place to get seeds and saplings."

"That's going to take a long time," He pointed out.

"Maybe... but grass spreads surprisingly fast, and so do some bushes," I pointed out. "I'm not saying we will have forests by next year... but if we put some effort into it, once we are more established, we might be able to start spreading some greenery around here. Until then..."

"It keeps looking like crap," Carlos finished, shaking his head. "What are the chances that the Headquarters has something to fix it?"

"The chances it can fix stuff around the HQ are actually pretty high," I admitted with a shrug. "But I wouldn't bet on it having a solution for the area in general, or beyond. It doesn't seem like that kind of system."

We quietly stood watch for the remaining two hours, scanning the surrounding area, both with our eyes and with our monoculars. The building actually gave a pretty view of the Potomac, and if the whole place didn't look like crap, as Carlos said, it would have been a pretty nice spot. As it was, it was a tactically advantageous spot, one that I would remember for the future.

When it was time to go, we quickly ate breakfast before slowly guiding the camels down the stairs. This was actually quicker than getting them up, as we could all see much better in the morning light. The camels also seemed more willing to walk down stairs than up them, which was strange, considering they were robots, but the results spoke for themselves.

Once we had regrouped at the base of the building, we once again set out along the road. I was hoping to reach the large bridge that crossed the river sometime later in the day. Once we did, we would likely stop there for the night. It was probably going to be on the early side, but I didn't want to start crossing along the city side halfway through the day.

The idea of being forced to sleep inside the city was *not* something I was willing to risk.

We continued to make progress as we walked along the river. Twice we had to stop and make a slight detour, going off the road to avoid mirelurks, the mutated crabs claiming some of the shoreline. In the game, they were lethal bastards, their shells tanking a whole lot of damage unless you could manage to hit their faces. While my people were good, none of us had VATS, so I was unwilling to risk catching their attention.

I made a mental note to ask the people at Rivet City what the best way to deal with them was. They would know if they were as difficult to deal with in real life as they were in the game, or if there was some sort of trick. I was pretty sure there was a sound frequency that made them run for the hills, but I had no idea what it was.

It probably wouldn't be all that hard to find out, though...

Eventually, as the sun rose high into the sky, [our destination came](#) into view. The bridge was familiar even from this distance, as it was part of the path that you escorted Liberty Prime through at the end of the base game. During that quest, it was covered with power-armored Enclave, but now the only real threat I knew about was the raiders hanging out on the eastern side, which was the side we were approaching. The bridge was also partially collapsed on this side, but luckily, the base of the collapse made the perfect ramp, meaning we could easily get up. In the game, it had supported a massive robot, so I was relatively confident it could hold us, we just needed to clear the raiders under it first.

We quickly pulled off the road to avoid attracting attention and stashed the camels in a collapsed parking garage. Carlos and three other soldiers stayed back to keep an eye on them, while Johnson and I led the rest back to the road, where we moved in to observe the situation.

After about fifteen minutes, we had a good handle on the raiders living under the bridge. There were about twenty of them, with about half of them armed with guns, the rest lugging around whatever melee weapons they could manage. They were well within our capabilities, so after warning Carlos that we were going to engage, we carefully moved forward.

After about ten minutes of approaching the bridge, making use of the buildings along the road to hide our approach, we stopped. The snipers climbed a structure to gain a clear view of our target before we made our final push forward.

Once we were within range, we opened fire, killing a handful of the raiders and attracting their attention. Rather predictably, they rushed out to attack us, some taking cover once they left their camp behind, while others just screamed and charged at us. Of course, neither of those things meant anything to the much better-positioned snipers, who laid into them mercilessly. Within three minutes, the bridge base was clear, and we moved forward to investigate the raider's camp.

Under the bridge was actually a halfway decent place to set up a base, as it was high enough that, if you were attacked, you would be able to shoot down at anyone attacking you. Unfortunately for the raiders, they clearly didn't understand this, as they had rushed out to meet us rather than hunkering down and picking us off as we approached.

Once the base was cleared, Johnson and I looked out of the opposite side of the open-air camp, to where [the Citadel](#) stood, otherwise known as the Pentagon. It was quite a bit further from the bridge than it was in the games, which was probably the only reason that the raiders hadn't been wiped out already. Johnson pointed out groups of patrolling Brotherhood of Steel members in power armor, walking around the large building. I spotted several snipers stationed on the roof of the Citadel, which was when we decided to leave, quickly heading back before we were spotted. We quickly stashed the loot from the camp before starting to make our way back toward Carlos and my other soldiers.

"That's one hell of a tough-looking nut," Johnson admitted, referring back to the Citadel. "That power armor don't look too chummy either."

"This branch of the Brotherhood is mostly friendly to the natives, and shouldn't kill anyone who doesn't attack them first," I explained with a frown. "But you're not wrong."

"If we keep growing, they are gonna want to see us sooner or later," Johnson pointed out as we approached where Carlos and our camels were hidden away. "Especially if they have a hard-on for tech and we keep walking around with robots."

"I know, but I want a little more time before we deal with them," I said, shaking my head. "I don't have anything against them, not yet at least, but I still want a little more time to build up."

"Worried they'll push for control?" Johnson asked.

"I'm worried about a lot of things," I responded, shaking my head. "And growing a bit more and upgrading our capabilities will make-

We turned the last corner before the area where we had stashed the camels, my soldiers following right behind us. As expected, we spotted Carlos and the others standing there, waiting for our return.

Unfortunately, they were not alone.

Standing with them, in a way that at least appeared non-threatening, was a trio of power armor-clad Brotherhood of Steel soldiers, as well as five troopers, all wearing full combat armor.

"You were saying?" Johnson asked, his raised eyebrow audible.

"Fuck."