

The supplies Elder Lyons promised arrived within an hour, delivered in a pair of crates. Inside were a few sealed cans and several bags of dried wasteland fruit and jerky. None of it was anything special, though we did share a chuckle about how we couldn't quite tell what the meat was. As for the quality, to us it was all decent but below-average food, but the quality and cleanliness would have made it a premium supply for wastelanders. As far as we could tell, they were pretty low in terms of radiation, with our Geiger counters barely registering anything.

It still made me nervous, but I was doing my best to dampen my paranoia about it until we met with the scientists in Rivet City. I also seemed to remember a doctor who lived in the large beached boat that we could talk to well. Hopefully, they would be able to explain things properly.

Once we finished dinner, we set up a watch schedule and headed to bed. As before, Carlos and I were given the final watch in the morning, giving us eight hours of uninterrupted sleep. Johnson took the first watch, receiving the same benefit, while everyone else had their night split into two chunks. This time, I didn't complain about it, accepting the benefit my leadership gave me.

Ultimately, my soldiers had been right about needing me at the top of my game, which getting a full night's sleep would help happen. I was also beginning to realize that, in some ways, it was expected and necessary for me to receive these benefits. Someone had to be at the top, and on some level, accepting that was stabilizing for the lower-ranked people.

It sounded pretentious and like an excuse to take advantage of my position, but it also seemed to hold some truth.

The first time around, when I had attempted to convince my soldiers that I didn't need special treatment, it had a small but noticeable effect on them. Nothing that would change the abilities as soldiers, but in a way that was difficult to describe, it was almost as if behaving less like a stereotypical leader, taking advantage of their position, made them see me as less stable as a leader. Again, it wasn't like they were about to rebel or anything, not like they could, but when I accepted without complaint his time, it was almost reassuring to them, at least from what I could see.

While everyone else was asleep, I pulled Johnson aside from his watch partner to ask if I was just deluding myself. He just chuckled.

"Leaders are supposed to be in control, a step above their subordinates," he explained. "Watching someone hem and haw about not wanting to be special doesn't inspire confidence. It makes them worried you might not be decisive. It's good to know your leader isn't a corrupt bastard, but you need to be in control. Sometimes that means taking the prime shift, and other times it means sacrificing your comfort or more for the mission. "

"Sounds complicated."

"It's a balance. You're not a king, but you need to be at the top," He explained. "You'll get a feel for it, hell, the fact that you spotted it means you already are."

I let out a sigh before thanking him for his time. The cigar-smoking marine patted my shoulder before heading up to the roof to stand watch, and I headed to the garage to finally get some sleep.

The following morning, Carlos and I were woken up by the previous watch, so we quickly headed to the roof, where we kept an eye on the surrounding area for the next hour or so. Eventually, my people started to wake up, and I headed down to distribute the rest of the supplies from the Brotherhood of Steel. As we were eating, the telltale sound of power armor, which I was now getting much more familiar with, reached the fuel station.

Johnson and I shared a look before stepping out to greet our temporary companions. Sure enough, Sentinel Lyons and Paladin Walters were approaching from the same direction they had left by the previous afternoon.

"Sentinel Lyons, Paladin Walters, good morning," I greeted with a nod. "We are just finishing up breakfast. I assume you have both eaten?"

"Correct," Sarah responded. "When will you be ready to leave?"

"Fifteen minutes," I assured. "Just need to prep the camels and finish packing up."

She nodded, her armor shifting as she turned to walk the perimeter. I noticed that both of the soldiers had packs mounted to the back of their power armor, tightly and firmly attached. As the Sentinel walked away, I turned to Walters.

"Not very happy to be here, is she?" I asked with a raised eyebrow.

"This is an important task, escorting potential allies is not something we take lightly," he responded politely. "But... she takes a dim view of things that take her away from fighting the super mutant menace. She was about to head out in a few days for another mission when Elder Lyons assigned her to this."

"I suppose her poor mood is fair," I said with a frown, turning to watch her walk out of sight around the edge of the large fuel station. "I would be annoyed as well if I got reassigned to a friend-making mission when IO was supposed to be doing something else I thought was more important."

Paladin Walters nodded in agreement, staying outside as I headed into the garage and started encouraging people to hurry up and finish eating. We managed to get ready in just ten minutes, people checking their weapons, ammo, and armor before finally mounting the camels.

As we moved, it took us a few minutes to find a good pace. The power armors, two sets of T-60s, moved faster than a normal person's jogging pace but not fast enough to be called a run. They could likely push themselves much faster, but this was apparently their long-distance

speed, with the armor doing almost all of the work. Matching it with the camels took a few tries, but eventually we got it down.

We were going to have to solve that issue when we eventually got our own power armor, as there was no way we would be moving that slowly for any long-distance trips that we didn't absolutely have to.

Once we were moving, Sentinel Lyons directed us to cut through back into the buildings that lined that side of the Potomac. It was significantly less dense than the "main" city, at least at this point, but it was still noticeably more dense than the outer outskirts.

"So, what sort of issues can we expect on the way to the tunnel?" I asked the leading Sentinel. "Anything we should keep in mind, or keep our eyes open for?"

"Ghouls are always a problem in packed areas like these," she responded easily.

"No matter how many times you clear them, they keep draggin' themselves out of some new corner you missed," Walters explained, shaking his head. "When walking through someplace like this, unless you can see all four corners of a room, assume there's a ghoul somewhere."

"We haven't had nearly that much of an issue at our base," I admitted with a frown.

"I assume it's further from the main city?" Walters asked, I continuing when I nodded. "Ghouls are everywhere, but they aren't as pervasive the further you go from all that."

He gestured to the other side of the river, where buildings were much tighter.

"Scribes think it's got something to do with the conditions ghoulfication takes," he explained. "The city is perfect, the city outskirts are less perfect, and further beyond that, even less so. Still happens, just a lot less frequently."

"You can also run into pockets of giant mole rats," the Sentinel explained. "And Mirelurks are a problem in any flooded or waterside area."

The way she spoke was clinical, as if she were passing along an update to a report she had delivered to a superior officer. Since I highly doubted that she considered me one, it was much more likely she was trying to be polite and complete her "friendly" task without actually being anything of the sort.

It was frustrating, but not entirely unexpected. I would reserve judgment until the BOS leader had a bit more time to unclench and get to know us.

We crossed through the city, buildings on either side of us. Half of my people kept their eyes on the ground, watching for hidden mines, tripwires, or other traps, while the others watched the buildings, keeping an eye open for snipers. Meanwhile, the camels kept plodding on, following our two BOS guides.

"How much can these things lift, anyway?" Walters asked, turning to look up at me without stopping his march. "You got a good amount on them."

"They were primarily designed to transport water or other liquids," I explained. "They can transport a hundred and fifty gallons, though that's nearly at their breaking point. Around a hundred gallons is more reasonable."

"That's... not bad, especially for spindly legs," he responded, looking down at the camel's hooves. "That's what, a thousand pounds?"

"It's a bit less, but yeah."

"You know, that's just about how much a T-60 weighs," He pointed out. "One thousand two hundred pounds."

"I'm not letting you ride a camel in power armor," I said, rolling my eyes. "When we stop for the day, I might let you try if you get out of the power armor, but that's it."

He chuckled, but didn't comment further.

At noon, we stopped for a break, spreading out our lunch rations and water, and filling up our canteens from one of the camels carrying our water supply. We filled a canteen for Walters and Lyons, as well as offered them some of our food. Lyons declined, but Walters accepted, stepping out of his armor to eat with the rest of us. I was pretty sure Lyons was glaring at him when he climbed out. Rather than following suit, she simply popped off her helmet, shaking out her hair and looking around the impromptu camp we set up under a small overpass.

Sarah Lyons looked stern, though that was likely due to her mood. Her hair was blonde, pulled back in a ponytail with a simple black band. She was pale, likely from how much time she spent in her armor, with grey-blue eyes that moved with intelligence and confidence. She was beautiful in a striking, "I could kill you in five different ways without even breaking a sweat" kind of way.

"Holy hell, this stuff is good," Walters commented, having cracked open his MRE, munching on a granola bar. "Where did you find these?"

"We make them. Well, we don't make them, the home base does. They get transported here with our other deliveries," I explained. "Perfect nutrition in tasty prepackaged form."

In all honesty, I planned on bumping up the quality of our food again as soon as we could. It was far from bad at this point, but making our food better was a great way to reward my soldiers for their hard work.

"Certainly better than any MRE I've ever eaten."

"Probably because the ones you've eaten are pre-war," I pointed out.

We were sitting around, eating lunch for about five minutes before I realized that Sarah had set up alone, sitting on a burnt-out car just under the shade of the overpass. Her laser rifle

was within reach as she looked down the road, slowly chewing through her rations. With a frown, I stood, taking a few steps toward her when Walters stopped me.

"Careful, General," He warned. "She usually takes some time to cool off."

I nod, but continued walking, eventually sitting on the edge of some broken up concrete just a few feet from her. She may be a bit prickly, but I had a secret weapon. Commiseration.

"Sentinel Lyons, I wanted to apologize for getting you dragged away from your work," I said, watching as she looked at me with a raised eyebrow. "When Elder Lyons suggested an escort, I assumed we would be assigned a few soldiers, not one of this chapter's best. I appreciate the gesture in the spirit it was made, but in all honesty... we could have done this with a map."

She was silent for a long moment, studying my face, eventually leaning back slightly. Then, to my internal delight, she let out a long sigh of defeat.

"I appreciate the apology, but it's not your fault," she admitted, shaking her head. "Ordinarily, I would understand why something like this is important. Friendly groups like yours with actual resources are rare, sending out a high-ranking guide isn't a stretch. But I was pulled from another mission to reinforce one of our outposts. My men will be fighting without me, and that doesn't sit well."

"Understandable," I said with a nod. "I have a feeling that as our outpost here grows, I'm going to be expected to settle down and run the base, not go out with my men. It's necessary as a leader, but I'm going to hate every moment of it."

"Your soldiers seemed well trained," She said. "It's rare to see in a wasteland group."

"Oh, trust me, I know," I said, shaking my head. "I'm worried some of the guard around Megaton might not know which end of their gun the bullets come out of."

That got a laugh out of her, and I reached into one of my pockets, pulling out the lemonade drink packet from my MRE.

"Here, this is a flavor packet from our meals," I explained. "Pour it into your canteen and give it a shake. It's got all the stuff you need to replenish what you sweat out. Keeps you from cramping up or anything like that. Plus, it tastes pretty good."

She reaches out and accepts it, letting it sit in the palm of her large, power armor clad hand.

"What's in it?" she asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Nothing dangerous or unnecessary," I assured. "I'm not casually dosing my soldiers, or myself, with stims or anything."

She nodded, reaching over to grab her canteen. As she brought it to her side, she frowned, realizing she wouldn't be able to open it. I chuckled and reached out, taking the packet,

tearing it open. She held out her canteen, and I poured the contents of the flavor packets into it. She then screwed on the cap carefully, before shaking the water for thirty seconds. Then she took a sip.

"Huh, not bad," She said with an appreciative nod. "Thanks."

"You're welcome. Maybe next time you can try the whole meal." I said with a smirk, before standing from my seat. "I'll let you know when we are ready to go. Shouldn't be long now."

She nodded, continuing her meal while I made my way back to the rest of the group, ignoring Paladin Walters' look of shock.