

## Chapter 30: Wasteland

“Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. Did you have any questions for me before you go?”

“Umm yes, how long is the position for?”

“It is a permanent position. We may not be a big corporation or anything, but we plan to stay around.”

“Thank you,” The woman stood up and exited the room.

Multiple tabs on my optics were opened with various information sheets, resumes, and other miscellaneous administrative documents, creating a mess in my vision. At least it seemed like that was the last interview for the day.

As I was finishing up the paperwork, Vin entered the meeting room.

“Your lawyer says to call once you are free. We can also leave whenever you’re ready. The car is already out front.”

Releasing a deep breath, I looked up at the man, “Okay, just give me a few minutes.”

We got back into Vin’s old car once I was ready. I called the lawyer while he drove. I used the conversation to distract myself from Vin’s driving as best as I could.

Too bad the call didn’t last me the entire ride...

As we drove out of the city, the surrounding landscape quickly went from the urban city to an empty desert, with the road conditions growing drastically worse.

“We’re going to be heading into the wasteland soon. Get ready for a bumpy ride,” Vin announced.

*I’m not sure if I should be afraid or very afraid when hearing that from him...*

Not long after his warning, a natural disaster came into sight. The entire scenery in front of me was filled with a wall of sand. It was strangely ominous that a raging sandstorm was just straight ahead, while the area in my direction was entirely calm, as if there was an invisible wall blocking the sandstorm.

It was one thing to read about the wasteland and another to witness it yourself. No wonder the corporations gave up on this mess and focused on developing space instead.

“Quite something to see for the first time, right?” Vin noted.

“...Is it always like this? That’s safe to drive into?”

“Yep, though communications are limited to short-range in there. There’s a reason why even corps can’t do anything about the wastelanders living in there after all.”

“...I swear I just saw a streak of electricity flash by.”

“It’s fine. It only happens high in the sky. It may fry some unshielded electronics if it’s too close, but it’s mostly harmless.”

Not long after, our car slowed down and entered into the storm. The sound of sand rattling against the car rang out unrelentingly, but other than that, we were able to continue moving. I watched as Vin navigated through the storm using the GPS instead, as the storm blocked almost all visibility.

“I thought long-range communications were blocked. Is that saved nav data?”

“That’s right, I have a good chunk of this area mapped out from my jobs. The place we’re going to is over here, not too far.”

We soon arrived at what the map showed as the foot of a small mountain.

“A lot of corps have outposts in valleys around the area since there is a good spot to salvage materials from the ruins of the old civilization. I happen to know a good spot here that I use as a grouping point during my travels. It’s pretty small, though, so we’ll have to look around for a better spot for an outpost.”

The car pulled up in a small valley surrounded on three sides by the elevated terrain around it. It was a spot where the storm barely reached.

We only stopped for a moment before we started searching for potential spots where we could set up the outpost. There weren’t a lot of unclaimed natural areas where sandstorms died down, so we looked for spots to dig into instead.

“I think that’s enough for now. We should head back,” I noted as I reviewed the new nav data I gained.

“Sure, want to go by the ruins as well to check it out? Might as well make this trip worth it.”

*There are still a few hours until sunset. So why not?*

“Okay, let’s check it out.”

True to his words, it barely took fifteen minutes until we arrived at the ruins. It was obvious we were there as the storm weakened, shielded by the many buildings and skyscrapers in the surroundings.

Vin handed me a mask as we disembarked from the car. I took in the view of the ruined city that I'm sure once stood tall. Just the materials from the alloys used in the construction of these old buildings alone were enough for my current purpose, barring a few types I may need missing.

"Careful, this area is well scavenged, but mutant wildlife still roams around as they make these old buildings their homes."

We didn't plan to go into any dangerous areas today, so we stuck to a short walk around where we parked. We entered what seemed to be an old residential apartment and found the place mostly empty.

We climbed up the building and found some old furniture, but all the electronics or anything of value were missing. It wasn't until we climbed up to the floors higher up, in the double digits, that we found more junk in each apartment.

"While most corporations claim an entire town or city for themselves, this one here is unclaimed and anyone can come, including the riffraff who are looking to make some quick creds, but I think all this junk left behind will fulfill your needs."

He was right. To transport them in bulk, though, I would have to invest in some trucks, and that was exactly what I was planning to do. The profits from transforming the raw materials into cybernetics would cover the expenses.

The two of us, with our augmented limbs, carried a fridge back down the stairs. He filled it with a bunch of other junk, like metal pipes, into it as well. The short walk soon brought us within sight of the car when a sudden growl came from its direction.

We stopped in place and before we could place the refrigerator down, a sand-colored lizard the size of a go-kart leaped over the vehicle, straight toward us. The moment its legs touched the ground, it dashed so fast its limbs blurred.

As if we were telepathic, we dropped the fridge down at the same time and pulled out our weapons. We didn't have time to point our weapons at the lizard as we both dove out of the way of the charge. I got up and found myself against a wall of a building to only duck from pure reflex as I caught a glimpse of something lashing out at me.

The sound of concrete crumbling rang out behind me as little chips of debris rained down around me. I brought my gun up to search for the target, only to hear a gunshot a few meters away. Glancing up, I was just in time to see Vin firing another shot of his pistol grip shotgun at the lizard that was visibly bleeding dull green blood through the holes in its rear leg.

The second shot landed on its front leg, further restricting its movement, so I took the opportunity to line up a shot with my railgun from behind the lizard, mindful of Vin's positioning. The familiar sound of the projective breaking the sound barrier resonated in my ears as I pulled the trigger again. By the third time, the lizard slumped down on its stomach.

+10 EXP

The familiar experience notifications appeared above its body. I instantly opened my status to confirm.

Status	
Level:	11
EXP:	180/1100
Musculoskeletal:	76
Neural Reflex:	15
Visuomotor Coordination:	27
Endurance:	24
Sensory Perception:	52
Upgrade Points:	0
Upgrades:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Stealth +7</li><li>● Hacking +3</li><li>● Cybernetic Engineering +6</li><li>● Stealth Technology +6</li><li>● Software Engineering +4</li></ul>
Enhancements:	SAID: Zenitech Hoth Mk.3 Optics: Nova Tech Stars Mk.4 Cyberarm (Left): Nova Tech Mudra Mk.6 Cyberarm (Right): Nova Tech Shiva Mk.5 Auditory: Amazing Corp FieldTac Gen 2 Cardiovascular: BioGen Labs Marathon 4 Miscellaneous: HSU Custom Shade

*So these mutants really do give me experience points too...*

A voice that came from right beside me startled me, "Sandcrawlers. Could've been worse, but let's get out of here before anything else smells the blood."

I nodded in agreement and we doubled timed out of there with our salvage. Looking toward the back of the truck, it seemed much smaller now, with the fridge taking up space.

*We'll need big trucks or something to make every trip worth it.*

From the ruins, we headed straight back to the city. I couldn't help but be on the lookout for more lizards crawling about.

I let out a mental sigh of relief once our car exited the sandstorm, "Let's take a day break tomorrow, then we'll rent equipment and build out a preliminary outpost before we work out how we'll operate with the team."

"Sure thing," Vin answered.

With us being out of the wasteland, we could actually see out of the windshield again. It sounded really quiet without the wind battering against the car constantly. Watching the sandstorm behind me, I caught sight of a small convoy of vehicles exiting out of it a distance away.

They had expensive-looking armored vehicles for escorts and larger transports in the middle of their convoy, though they all seemed to be worn out, with small dents and burn marks all over them.

"We're taking a small detour. Those corpos don't like anyone straying too close," Vin noted.

"Those are the transports that you used to escort?"

"Yeah, that's a Holly Corp convoy. They've stopped hiring contractors and gone full in-house only. They're probably coming from further in-land, Firebird or something."

"Is it expensive transporting things around here?"

"Depends on the season. It affects the area the wasteland encompasses. Planes can't fly through it, so they have to go on a really long detour that makes it no longer financially worth it."

We safely made it back to the city, though the trip took longer than planned, as we had to take the scenic route. We ended our first adventure out into the wasteland as Vin dropped me off at my hotel.

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"You sure we should lease these ones?" I said as I stared at the car in front of me that looked like it was on its last leg with all the rusted frame.

"Trust me, this is the best thing for the job within your budget. It'll just take a little work to fix these up and they'll be stellar. Too bad they don't use good ole' combustion engines, they are less prone to failure when exposed to the magnetic storms in the wasteland."

"Okay, I'll leave it up to you to decide."

That took the last thing off the checklist. The production site was ready, and we just needed to go fetch our rental equipment. With the shopping done, we went to rendezvous with our new hires at a small warehouse we rented.

I spent all of yesterday confirming the paperwork to receive the keys to the small warehouse we rented where we will be processing the salvage and turning them into cybernetics.

The zoning was strict here, so all the other buildings around were manufacturing-related. In return, it had ample space, unlike in Elevate City, where skyscrapers dominated the island with little areas allowed for factories. We didn't need a lot of space for our productions, so it was possible to do it back there as well, but it was simply more efficient to have everything done within the same building.

When we entered, the people inside abruptly stopped their conversation and swiftly assembled in front of us. All the gear and equipment they wore were mismatched except for the blue armband they each wore.

Vin stepped forward, "So everyone here has been briefed? Any questions?" After a short moment of silence, he continued, "Okay, then you all know what to do. We're heading out with the heavy equipment."

We split off into two trucks and two Amazing Corp Vanguards Vin had refurbished. We had a dozen people between the four vehicles.

Our vehicles were of an older generation compared to the sleek high-tech ones that I saw in the corpo convoys, but the ones we had weren't anything to sneeze at either. The Vanguards were equipped with a proper turret and were quite similar to Humvees from my old world.

Not long after we entered the sandstorm known as the wasteland, our detection equipment picked up several cars nearby traveling at high speeds with suspected gunfire coming from them.

Vin, our head of security's voice, rang out in everyone's comms, "Everyone, check your weapons. We have guests."