

Chapter 73: Sand Bat

After we had our fun testing the new car, we slept in the next morning as we had to wait for Ophelia from Airo Tech to finish all the paperwork for renting their prospecting equipment.

Once I woke up, I waited by fine-tuning the car until a small convoy from Airo Tech finally arrived.

“Ophelia, a pleasure to see you again.”

“Rollo, the pleasure is mine,” she replied as she shook my hand.

She signaled for her people to unlock the truck, opening the back door to reveal a minivan. The vehicle itself was the prospecting equipment that was rated to work within the sandstorms of the wasteland.

“I’m doing this as a favor for you, Rollo. Make sure you get the Sand Bat back to us in one piece next month.”

“Right, I really appreciate it.”

I watched as they handed the vehicle over, and our employees immediately got to the handover, which included testing the vehicle out and documenting its condition. Once everything was in order, we both signed the contract and were officially given access to the Sand Bat.

The Airo Tech people swiftly left once the handover was complete, while ours began a more thorough investigation of the vehicle.

The last thing we need is for them to include some sort of tracker with it or other surprises.

It was well past lunchtime when the vehicle completed the inspections. We immediately headed out to the wasteland and tried to make up for lost time, but the Sand Bat could only go so fast. It would be a little too late to bring it out again once we arrived at the outpost, so we settled on a regular trip to the nearby ruin.

“You know, Rollo, even with that giant prospecting machine, it isn’t so easy finding anything useful. Otherwise, all the corps wouldn’t be in such a bind,” Thorne said, as we drove back from our outing.

“It’s better than not trying at all. Or would you rather we hit up a corporate-owned mine and take control of it?”

“No thanks, I’d rather not fight unless victory is assured.”

“Well, then we better go over how to best make use of that thing when we get back.”

“So, what do you guys have to show after a whole week out there with your new toy?” Claire said across the video call with a smirk.

“It’s just the first week. We have at least three more and we are still learning how to use the Sand Bat.”

“Right, well, tell me when you guys strike gold.”

“...Sure. Anyway, how’s it going back in Elevate City?”

“Just a few firefights here and there, nothing notable.”

Thorne and I exchanged looks with raised eyebrows before he asked, “Elabor—”

“It’s fine, it’s over already. Oh, there was one thing you guys should know. We started training the personnel at the clinic. Once their training is complete, we’ll be sending them your way to the planned NLA clinic. Vin says he found several spots already, so you guys better find the time to hash out the details on your end before then.”

“Okay, then we’re hopping off now. We’re going to get a head start on that so we can get back to the wasteland on schedule.”

“See you, bye.”

“Don’t get into any trouble, Claire,” Thorne added before the call disconnected.

We split our tasks and Thorne went to deal with the new clinic while I went to study the mechanism of the Sand Bat. We had to do it when we were outside the wasteland or we wouldn’t have any connection in there.

Using the terminal in my office, I browsed through the web in search of information regarding the Amazing Tech Sand Bat. To no one’s surprise, there wasn’t anything useful to be found for free, especially any technical specifications.

The good news, though, was that there existed paid sources that discussed the detailed specifications of the older version of the machine, with benchmarks to compare to the other similar equipment in the market.

After paying an amount equal to a few months’ pay for most workers, I downloaded the information onto my SAID. I pulled it up in my vision and left my office to take a walk as I read.

By the time I got in line at one of the nearby dessert shops, I came across the information I was looking for.

I continued reading and referenced various other information online, as I sipped on my milkshake on my way back.

“Rollo, you didn’t go check out the potential places for the new clinic together with Thorne?” A voice called out as soon as I entered the office garage.

I turned to see Vin, huddled with several security guards, around a Vanguard.

“No, I let him take charge of that while I look into the Sand Bat.”

I resumed walking away, toward my office, and I could hear him following.

“How is it going on that front, then? I just got the finance boys complaining about the maintenance bill.”

“If you want to know the details, I found out that the Sand Bat makes use of a type of ground-penetrating radar that could work through the radiation of the wasteland to a certain degree. The sand, however, decreased the penetrating range by quite a bit.”

“...And how does that help us?”

That is the question I have been pondering my entire way back.

“I’m sorry to tell you, but the entire wasteland is filled with sand,” He continued.

That isn’t true... Our outposts, the wastelander settlements, the ruins... In all those places, you could actually step on solid ground.

“That’s it! We bring the Sand Bat to places with minimal amounts of sand,” I declared.

“Well, if it improves its scanning range, why not? I’m not sure you’d find a mine in such specific places, though.”

“Seriously? We exhausted all other places, and you want to bring it underground now?” Thorne complained as we stared at the rubble in front of us.

“Peng is hungry. Andrew, can we eat yet?”

“What did I tell you earlier, Peng...?”

The other three occupants of the car were all making a lot of background noise for me as we drove toward the ruins.

It’s been a few weeks since we started working together, so the two guards, Peng and Andrew, got a lot more informal with us.

“This’ll be the best way to scan deeper than most corp had done before. The best way to find something is to search places others haven’t looked at yet, right?”

“Sure, but look at all the stuff we have to bring for this. People are going to complain if this was for nothing.”

We glanced back at the convoy behind us. Half a dozen Vanguard's escorting a cargo truck and a cement truck.

“Let them. They're getting paid, so they'll just be venting.”

After another thirty minutes of driving, we made it to the ruins we had visited on the first day the four of us came.

We navigated the terrain from memory and soon found the entrance to the skyscraper that had access to the underground network.

While doing the preliminary scans around this town didn't produce any results. I thought we could scan deeper inside by bringing the Sand Bat underground, shielded from the sandstorm, and closer down for a deeper scan.

“Andrew, Peng, you two stay outside with the team to defend our vehicles. Let's go, Thorne.”

We took two squads of guards with us and traced the path we had taken last time.

The murky water on the way down hadn't changed, and we cautiously scanned the pool for any mutants as we advanced.

+10 EXP

+10 EXP

What is wrong with the mutants...? They keep coming back to the same spots as if they are respawning there. But then, they smarten up after a few gets killed and clear the area again.

We thoroughly cleared the area before we turned back. It was time to start building a ramp for the Sand Bat to get down here.

Heavy equipment was soon brought out, pulverizing any rubble in the way to make room for us to pave a new road down.

“Rollo! There's a lot of activity headed our way. I don't think the mutants like all the noise we're making.”

“All teams, take up defensive positions. Time for you guys to earn your paycheck!”

We had brought half a dozen Vanguard's here, which amounted to twenty guards if you didn't include my team.

The Vanguard's were placed protectively around the building to make use of their turrets, so we weren't worried on that front. The one that seemed to be a problem was the underground tunnel we were working on.

I watched as my security set up machine guns and the turrets on our vehicles while we prepared for the wave of monsters to come.

It didn't take long before we heard the screeching of some Sandcrawlers outside followed by the rumbling of the tunnel. Thanks to the impressive magnification of my optics, I was the first to spot a wave of mutant crocodiles and rudents rushing out together at us.

I double-checked the ammo I loaded into my rifle and secured the explosives on my belt, as I wouldn't be using them in this small tunnel.

As scary as mutants could be, they were nothing before human ingenuity when we had time to prepare. We verified the effectiveness of crossfires that day and gained me a lot of experience points.

"Here, remember to hydrate." I held out my flask over to Thorne.

He may be a cyborg now, but that doesn't mean he doesn't need food and water. Even more so since his torso still has many biological parts, unlike most cyborgs.

"Thanks." He grabbed it and chugged the entire thing.

I relaxed in my seat as I surveyed our surroundings. The lobby of this tower was filled with bodies of the mutants we slayed while our engineers were hard at work, building a ramp into the lower level.

The two of us sat in silence, resting from the previous battle. It wasn't exactly the most intense battle, but it was exhausting on us mentally as we had to be on the constant lookout for any mutants trying to get the jump on us.

We both watched as one of our employees approached.

"Sirs, we are done constructing the ramp. It should dry overnight and be usable tomorrow morning."

"Thank you for your hard work. Go ahead and tell them we'll be camping here as planned. Have the engineers find and seal off any undesirable entry points," I replied.

"Yes, sir."

With our men's hard work, we soon had a basic camp set up inside the lobby. It was mainly a cooking area and washrooms, as it was safer for us to rest in our vehicles.

We took shifts to rest through the night, and in the morning, we began our expedition underground with our Sand Bat. The engineers had tested the strength of the structural integrity of the tunnels and they could easily withstand the prospecting vehicle, but our armored Vanguard was another story.

Every fifty meters, we would stop and have the Sand Bat perform a scan with its radar. It would then give us a detailed layout of the ground beneath us and identify the basic material composition as well.

The majority of the time, we only came up with soil and rocks. There were some small deposits of common metals found too, but they weren't significant enough to be worth the trouble.

We pushed on until we arrived near the retail unit that had its flooring collapse on us the last time we were here, resulting in a giant hole into the abyss.

"Sir, the scan is done, and we found a large tunnel underneath here. Here, take a look." He handed his terminal over to me.

I took a cursory glance, "Anything noteworthy?"

"The tunnel has significant veins of the rare metals we need."

I quickly scrolled to the page for material composition to confirm her words.

Jackpot.