

# Fallout: Vault 186 Ch 3

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Below ground wars don't end...they become more personal

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THE INVESTIGATION Lieutenant Jacob Brittle of the Vault Security Police Force grimaced at the sight of the destroyed upper eastern bloc reactor station of Vault 186. Two weeks had passed since the overload catastrophe that claimed the lives of over half of the technicians assigned to the power hub. Jacob was a tall, well-built man; about six and a half feet with short, bright red hair and a large forehead decorated with several horizontal worry-lines. Many of his colleagues often chastised the lieutenant, warning him that his constant frowning would eventually take its toll and even though they were right, no one chastised him that day. The investigation team was busy scouring the rubble, searching for any signs of foul play, a task Jacob felt was a waste of time. Only a month ago the entire Vault was overtaken by a string of protests that had caused a level of civil unrest unseen by anyone since before the Vault's construction. With the current crisis of low power following the explosion, the security force should have been out patrolling the halls and putting down any signs of trouble before they started. Jacob wasn't against allowing those who wished to leave the ability to do so but no one had left and that was what worried him. Overseer Suarez's speech was, in Jacob's opinion, a monumental display of persuasive skill. But it was still just a speech. Jacob was at the power hub that same day the Overseer spoke to the mass of protesters through a radio, standing between them and the reactors that the rebels intended to shut down to secure their freedom. Now they were silent. Too silent; eerily silent. It made Jacob feel uneasy. It made him suspect that while exploring the outside may have been a somewhat claustrophobia induced desire for some of the protesters; maybe some of the instigators were only interested in using the civil unrest as a way to seize power. There were no designated leaders for the exploration movement, but Jacob knew there were leaders. Someone had to have instigated the talks into near terrorist action and Jacob had a sinking feeling he knew who it was. During the protest, near the front but semi-hidden behind just enough people to appear unassuming, he had seen her; Melinda Barret. Jacob knew that there were legitimate grievances and concerns brought up by the protesters but ever since he had seen her something didn't sit right with him. She was married to John Barret; the governmental chairman for the upper eastern bloc and the leader of a growing political contingent whose sole platform seemed to be the opposition of anything the Overseer implemented. The difference was that unlike most other political parties, John and Melinda's group was far more inclined to physically challenge the authority

of the V.S.P.F., much to the detriment of Jacob and his men. Jacob's frown began to increase until he was shaken from his thoughts by a passing Mister Handy janitorial robot. The metal droid harbored three squid-like appendages connected to a spherical chassis, each equipped with a unique tool or device such as a buzz saw, a gripping hook, and a flamethrower. A powerful propulsion system built into the bottom of the chassis allowed the droid to hover several feet off of the ground and three optical orbs connected to short jointed rods extended from the top. "Pardon me sir." The robot said with a polite British accent. Jacob gave the droid an unamused frown as it scuttled by him carrying a large chunk of scrap metal from the destroyed power station. The security lieutenant never trusted the robots and had petitioned to have them decommissioned or at the very least, stripped of their obviously dangerous weapons. Jacob didn't enjoy the idea of artificially intelligent flying robots armed with buzz saws and flamethrowers being given free reign of civilian population centers, but his petitions were always shot down on the grounds that the droids served an integral part in maintaining the Vault. "Sir!" Another voice called out to Jacob; this one was human. Jacob instantly recognized the member of his unit; James Connolly, a fine officer in Brittle's opinion albeit a bit too enthusiastic when it came to physical force. "What is it, Connolly?" Jacob asked. "The investigation team has uncovered something," James replied. "What is it?" "I think you're gonna want to see this for yourself." Navigating the station was frustrating. Tons of steel and stone debris still littered the floor and Jacob found himself having to catch his balance several times. More than once the lieutenant wondered how much more devastating the destruction would have been had the station not been constructed on the highest level of the Vault. Instead of just one work station being destroyed, another could have been pulled into the carnage once the ceiling gave way. Each newly ventured level of the Vault had been constructed with at least ten feet of stone between each layer, but a brief glance at the destroyed ceiling left the magnitude of destruction literally up in the air until demolition and construction crews were able to begin their examinations. Jacob followed James to the far end of the station where the once massive super computers that extended along the walls had been reduced almost entirely to scrap metal. One of the forensic scientists assigned to the investigation who was examining a charred panel from one of the destroyed computers rose to greet the lieutenant. "Lieutenant Brittle." She said with an extended hand. "Karen," Jacob said with a slight stutter as his memory of the woman's name came to the forefront of his mind. If the scientist had felt put off by the lieutenant's slip in memory, she didn't show it. "I'm told you have something important to show me," Jacob said after finally returning the gesture of greeting. "Important might be too strong a word to be throwing around this early in the investigation," Karen said giving James a sideways glance. "A more accurate description of what we've found would be...interesting." "Interesting." Jacob acknowledged with a nod. "Please explain." "Well, as I was explaining to Officer Connolly—" Karen began. "Sergeant ." James interrupted. "My apologies." Karen lied. "As I was explaining to, Sergeant Connolly, the main computer that was used to monitor and regulate the station reactors is...damaged." "Well, there was an explosion." Jacob didn't attempt to hide his annoyance at having to state the obvious. "Well, yes." Karen conceded, ignoring the sarcasm in the lieutenant's voice. "But it appears as if this computer was destroyed before the reactors exploded." "What?" Jacob said as another frown overtook his face.

Karen led the two men over to the wall that once harbored the supercomputer. Although charred, the wall still stood with relatively minimal damage except for one specific area that harbored a large dent. "I haven't finished my analysis yet, so this is all just speculation," Karen explained while extending her arms and using her hands to animate her words. "The dent here in the wall would be the first obvious indication that a separate explosion took place before or maybe even seconds after the reactors went." "That's quite the stretch, Karen," Jacob said with folded arms. "Maybe a piece of shrapnel from one of the reactors sliced through the computer and hit the wall." "It's possible." Karen agreed. "But then the pieces of debris from the computer are another clue." "This part is why I said you should see this all for yourself, sir," James added. "If the reactor explosion destroyed this machine, then the pieces would have been scattered more along the walls as the force from the blast would have imploded the computer inwards," Karen said confidently. "Now there are several pieces along the walls, but they are mostly from the far ends of the computer. What sparked my curiosity, however, was how all of the pieces that are spread outward into the station that I have located appear to be from the center of the computer." "Which just happens to be directly where that big dent is," Jacob concluded. "Shit." "As I said, my investigation is far from finished but the more evidence I find, the more inclined I am to share your sentiment concerning the situation," Karen said with foreboding dread. "Do you think it could have been one of the protesters?" James asked with a low tone. "That's the problem, Connolly. It's the most plausible and implausible scenario, which, is what I'm sure whoever did this was counting on." Jacob sighed. "I don't follow," Karen stated with fresh curiosity. "The protesters would have been the obvious suspects two months ago especially since they were right outside threatening to shut this station down," James explained. "But now it wouldn't make any sense for them to do this since the Overseer has basically said anyone can leave whenever they want. Why blow up the station when you can just walk out the door?" "Maybe there were some of them who wanted something other than the freedom to leave," Karen suggested, considering James's words. "Which makes this the most complicated and more importantly, most dangerous situation we've ever had to deal with since the protests started," Jacob said. "So, what's the plan then, boss?" James asked. "I'll let you know when I figure it out," Jacob replied. Elsewhere, many hours later, several workstations and living quarters down from the destroyed power station, Mathew Ford was just finishing up a meal at the upper eastern bloc cafe. The eating establishment occupied a semi-large section of the Vault that had a white tile floor decorated with red squares. The counters and tables were metal while like the rest of the Vault, the borders were a combination of stone walls with metal panels. Large red cushioned couches lined the center floor while small metal counters with metal stools beneath them extended out from the wall; some with large windows in front. Able to seat a maximum of forty residents at any given time, the café was one of the main hotspots for community functions and gatherings in the upper eastern bloc. Mathew took another bite of his veggie burger while trying his best to ignore the constant inquisitive gaze his daughter Katherine was giving him. He knew exactly what she wanted to talk about and knew she would not stop pestering him, even in silence, until he relented. "Doesn't he have an uncle living in one of the lower blocs? The west side?" Mathew said with a sigh after swallowing his food. "Dad." Katherine frowned. "His name was, Karl,

and he died three years ago." "He's got to have family somewhere," Mathew said, almost pleading. "You know he doesn't," Katherine said while shaking her head. "We don't have any room," Mathew said, switching tactics. The security captain had been trained to handle dangerous situations and hostile negotiations, but he knew he wasn't getting anywhere with his daughter. His late wife, Megan, had always teased that Katherine had inherited his iron will stubbornness and at that moment, the fact that she had been right had never been more evident. With nowhere else to send him, Mathew had temporarily taken Derek into his home with the hopes of finding some relative the boy could stay with. Unfortunately, the search had revealed that Derek's parents were the last remaining members of his lineage and with nowhere else for the boy to stay, Katherine had suggested they take him in. Of course, much to Mathew's dismay, the request had quickly turned into demand and now the temporary arrangement was quickly becoming permanent. "We can find a spare bed for my room." Katherine decided. "Most sixteen-year-old girls I know hate sharing their rooms with anyone, especially siblings," Mathew said, making one last feeble attempt at another solution. "Dad, he's lost everything. We are not going to abandon him. We're practically the only family he has left." Katherine stated with finality. "Except we're not his family," Mathew whispered. "What was that?" Katherine asked with a glare. "Nothing." Mathew coughed. Katherine was about to unload another verbal chastising on her father when, much to Mathew's relief, Jacob Brittle stormed into the café with a brisk pace. "Captain Ford." Jacob turned in the direction of the security captain after spotting him. "Jake? What's going on?" Mathew asked while already knowing something had happened. The lieutenant only addressed him as Captain when he had something serious to say. "Captain. We have a small situation at headquarters that requires your attention." Jacob explained. "Don't tell me headquarters has blown up too." Mathew said sarcastically. "No," Jacob replied with a slight cringe. "We've taken in a possible suspect." "Suspect to what?" Mathew asked. "The..." Jacob hesitated while giving Katherine an awkward glance. "Crime scene thinks the power hub explosion may have been intentional." "What?" Katherine shouted after nearly choking on her food. "Gotta go, honey." Mathew said after rising from his seat. "But you're supposed to be on vacation. The Overseer said—" Katherine began but was cut off. "The Overseer, my psyche evaluator, and half the force but if there is even a one percent chance that this was sabotage, then that means we've just had our first terror attack in the history of the Vault," Mathew stated. "I think it would be a good idea that the security force's commanding officer be present for the investigation." "But...!" Katherine could only manage the one word. "Don't stay out too late," Mathew ordered after a quick kiss on his daughter's forehead. "And bring some food back home for Derek." With that the two officers were out the door leaving the bewildered teen with the small crowd of Vault Dwellers scattered throughout the café. About half an hour later, Captain Mathew Ford stood outside of the V.S.P.F. interrogation room with his arms crossed, gazing through the two-way mirror at the individual suspected of sabotaging the power station. Beside him stood Lieutenant Jacob Brittle who took a similar posture with an added frown that surprisingly hid his true stoic emotions. On the other side of the mirror, Sergeant James Connolly and Officer Dennis Hsu stood on either side of the entrance. Their arms were also crossed and their eyes glared a hole through the suspect. Minutes later the door swung open and the two outside observants

entered the room. Jacob came to a halt on the right side of the large silver table while Mathew took a seat across from the suspect. For several minutes, Mathew only stared emotionlessly at the person seated across from him then finally clasped his hands together on the table and leaned forward. "Melinda Barret," Mathew said with a cold tone. "Mathew Ford," Melinda replied coolly. Another round of silence overtook the room as Mathew studied the woman in front of him. She was older than the security captain; somewhere around her mid-forties although her attractive features contradicted that fact. She had long brown hair that curved inward like some fashion model from the pre-war era, high cheekbones, full plump lips, and puffy cheeks which gave her a natural look of innocent beauty that betrayed the coldness radiating from her caramel eyes. Her skin was unusually tight for her age and the small flat mole beneath her left eye only seemed to heighten her attractiveness. She was physically fit and her body curved in all of the right places. For a moment, Mathew found it difficult not to stare at her ample bosom like an adolescent imbecile but managed to catch himself, hoping she hadn't noticed. "You wouldn't happen to know where your husband might be at this hour, would you?" Mathew asked suddenly. "I'm John's wife, not his keeper," Melinda said with a half chuckle and a smirk. "Pardon, my assumption," Mathew said unapologetically. "It's just with everything that has happened in the last few months I would imagine most people would want to know where their loved ones are at all times." "Well, Captain," Melinda said, leaning forward and clasping her hands together. "I can assure you that my husband can take care of himself." "Where were you on, Thursday, November twentieth between the hours of three and five p.m.?" Mathew asked, matching Melinda's smirk with one of his own. "The twentieth? That was so long ago. I'm a simple girl, Captain. I can barely remember what color panties I threw on this morning." Melinda replied with a shrug. Mathew leaned back at Melinda's last comment and managed not to let his attention be distracted by Dennis clearing his throat. "We'll give you a more thorough search before throwing you in a cell." Mathew calmly shot back. "We can find out together." "Imprisoning an innocent woman on suspicions you can't prove?" Melinda asked with faux surprise. "We both know you're not innocent." "We both know you have no evidence." Melinda's smirk grew into an inviting smile. "Besides, Captain, I'm a politician's wife. Women married to important men tend to stay in the spotlight even when they aren't trying, which is why your men dragged me down here all fast and discreet. Have you tried actually talking to people? I'm sure someone will remember where I was that day." Mathew held in a chuckle and continued to stare at the woman in front of him for what seemed like hours. She was right, they had no evidence and even if she or her husband were at the station the day it was destroyed there were probably a dozen people who would testify to seeing them elsewhere. Mathew needed hard evidence and he needed it fast. "I demand to see my wife." A muffled voice echoed from outside of the room. "Shit." Jacob sighed. "Looks like our time is up, boys." Melinda smiled. "I do hope we get to chat again soon, though." She said while staring directly into Mathew's eyes. Before the security captain could reply, however, John Barret burst into the interrogation room, nearly slamming the door into James. James and Dennis instinctively moved to restrain the infuriated politician and found themselves struggling to hold the surprisingly strong fifty something year old back. "Take your fucking hands off me." John growled. "Calm yourself, chairman," Jacob shouted while moving to help restrain

the gray haired politician. Mathew made no attempt to stop or follow Melinda as she rose from her seat giving the security captain a playful wink. Mathew remained seated with the smirk still on his face as the politician's wife strode over to her husband and placed a gentle hand on his chest. "It's ok sweetie, calm down," Melinda said soothingly. "Did they hurt you?" John said after ripping his arms free from the security officers who had finally loosened their grip. "They aren't that incompetent," Melinda assured him. "We were just having a friendly conversation. Come on, let's get out of here." "You people will be hearing from me and the Overseer soon," John threatened. "Someone is going to lose their job over this." "He's not serious...is he?" Dennis asked with a hint of worry in his voice. "Dead serious," Jacob replied with a nod and then placed a reassuring hand on the young officer's shoulder. "But don't worry. The Overseer is the one who authorized us to bring her in." "You ok, sir?" James asked Mathew, who was still seated at the table, the smirk still on his face. "What are you smiling about? You heard her, we've got nothing," Jacob asked with a frown. "We've got everything we need," Mathew replied confidently, much to the bewilderment of his men.