

As I suspected, Adam was thrilled with the offer of such fresh produce, doubly so when my claim that it was radiation-free was confirmed with a Geiger counter. His only gripe was that he wouldn't be able to transport them too far. The fruit was fresh, but it took time to cross the wasteland, and such delicate food was likely to get bruised, start wilting, or overripen.

"If I managed to get this to Rivet City, I could likely make a whole lot more money," He explained, biting his lip as he considered the idea, before shaking his head. "Unfortunately, the quickest route is filled with super mutants and raiders. Plus, I would have to cross the river, and that is always a risk, especially since I would have to hand out RadAway.

I paused for a moment, my mind going back to the path to Rivet City, remembering what the first trip was like. I immediately recalled the scripted battle between a group of super mutants, specifically one with a minigun, and a group of raiders, trading shots across the river.

"There isn't any way around them?" I asked.

"There is, but it adds days to an already long trip," he responds with a frown. "And it has its own challenges. There's a reason I stick to the Megaton route..."

He trailed off, his eye distant as he seemed to be recalling something, something very much not pleasant. I waited a moment for him to come back, but when he didn't, I spoke up, catching his attention.

"Right... well, you'll still buy them?"

"Oh! Yes, absolutely... how about three hundred and fifty per bag?" he said, turning an apple over in his hand.

"I think five hundred per bag is a much more reasonable starting point," I countered.

"No, that's too much, I won't be able to recoup my costs at that price," He claimed, shaking his head, putting the apple back into the duffel bag. "Three hundred and fifty is already pretty high."

"... four hundred then," I countered. "I could always just send some of my men out to bring it to Megaton on our own..."

"Yeah, but you'd struggle to get it all sold before it rots," He pointed out, holding up his hand to stop me from disagreeing. "Still, considering our close working relationship, I will take four hundred."

"Fantastic. You can keep the duffel bags, on the house," I said, reaching out to shake his hand, which he reciprocated.

"Appreciated, will save us the effort of stuffing them into our packs."

Once our goods and caps were exchanged, we returned to the HQ, more or less just sticking around to keep an eye on our guests. I trusted Adam far enough to not stab us in the

back or steal from us, mostly because we were, in his mind, the whole reason that the medical supplies and now food were being delivered here. He was too smart to try to kill the golden goose.

However, I did not trust him not to snoop around, which very well could result in him finding out that we weren't the tail end of a larger group, and that the HQ was the source of all the goods we were selling him. That information was dangerous, as it could lead someone to think that taking the HQ from me would allow them to get the benefits we did.

About three hours after we finished our short trading session, my people returned from their mission to finish what we had started earlier in the day. We offloaded what they had found, as well as what we had brought back ourselves earlier. While stuffing a few bags of old, broken, rotted, and water-damaged over-the-counter medicine into the feed shoot of the medbay, I took a moment to go over what we had in stock. We had been feeding the med bay pretty consistently and, at this point, had considerably more in stock than we had sold Adam the first time around. Hopefully, with the prior warning, a better idea of what he was looking for, and the time to prepare, I was hoping he would be able to buy a bunch more.

We also had a good amount of the nebulous feedstock that the medbay kept track of when we fed it supplies, but didn't immediately select something to be produced. We would likely be able to create what we needed to bring in for the doctors pretty easily, which was good because it would give us more time to focus on other things, rather than scavenging every day, all day.

After everyone was home, I set up a watch schedule so that we could keep an eye on the merchants overnight. Luckily, there were plenty of people to fill the schedule out, meaning no one had to miss that much sleep. I volunteered for the midnight shift, as that would be the one with the smallest chunks of consecutive sleep, but Joseph pointed out that out of everyone, it was more important that I had a clear head. In the end, Maxwell volunteered, as it was unlikely he would see any action.

The following morning, we woke up to the sound of knocking on the door. Apparently, I was being pretty lenient on my men, as the caravan was packed and ready to go a good hour before we would normally even wake up. Thankfully, Maxwell had a special connection to the HQ, or we would have slept right through it.

Once I shook hands with Adam and Reed again, wishing them both luck, I also confirmed that they would return within three or four days. Adam confirmed that the new brhamin would let them transport a good amount of medical supplies, which was good news. Once we said goodbye and waved the caravan off, we headed back inside HQ. I was too awake to sleep, so I ended up pulling out the HQ's main tablet and started reviewing our options. Meanwhile, Maxwell headed to his desk, starting to organize and prepare for the day, only to stop and pick up a piece of parchment.

"Oh," He said, turning it over in his hands. "Well, isn't this interesting..."

"What is it?" I asked, standing and making my way to the desk.

“See for yourself.”

He handed the paper to me as I got closer, and as soon as I took it, I realized what it was. It was a quest, printed on the same type of paper as the old ones.

“Weren’t these supposed to be rare?” I asked, looking up at Maxwell. “One or two a month or something?”

“Well... It has been just over two weeks,” He pointed out. “That’s pretty consistent with what they said.”

“...Huh, I guess you’re right,” I said, looking back down at the thick paper. “Doesn’t exactly feel like all that long...”

I shake my head after a moment, focusing on the words printed on the quest. It looked almost exactly the same as the old quest slips and made me feel oddly nostalgic, even if I was very happy with the current system.

The quest was a raid, directing us to clear out the [Springvale Elementary School](#) and the [surrounding town](#) of raiders. Apparently, there was a specific raider by the name of Boppo I needed to kill specifically. Beyond that, there were no numbers or data on how many raiders there were, just the mission to kill them all.

“Huh... Well, that’s an interesting mission,” I said with a frown, trying to recall the building and surrounding town as best I could from my many playthroughs of the game. “It’s a decent-sized dungeon in the game, with maybe twenty raiders? Maybe a couple of dogs, too? Considering the more realistic numbers and size... this could actually be a challenge, even with all the new help.”

From what little we saw of the school on our way to Megaton, it was significantly larger than it was in the game. The school had a much more spread-out layout, rather than just a reused office building asset, like it had in the game. It was built with the concrete heavy, brutal Art Deco style, but from what we had seen, it had actually vaguely resembled a school. The town was in a similar boat, though a huge chunk of it was burned and wrecked buildings, there were also a lot more that were intact.

If the raiders had spread into the town, then I really had no idea how many there would be. Not to mention how difficult it would be to clear every building, all the while, raiders could ambush you at any moment.

I flipped over the parchment, scanning the reward, smiling when I saw what it was. The promise of the quests being bigger and the rewards being more substantial was apparently true, as they were offering another perk, specifically a choice out of three. According to the list, my options were Rad Resistance, Adamantium Skeleton, and Tag. Rad Resistance was just a flat twenty-five percent reduction in absorbed radiation. The fact that it said “absorbed” was just another hint that radiation in this world just flat out worked differently than what I was familiar with, which made me a lot more interested in something that reduced it by twenty-five percent.

On the other hand, Adamantium Skeleton was just a fifty percent reduction in damage to our bones. The implication in the description was that this was enough for a skull to resist a variety of low-caliber bullets, though certainly not any rifle rounds. That alone made it tempting, as with Stimpaks readily available, instagibbing was a critical concern, as we could come back from most other wounds.

Combined with our helmets and armor, Adamantium Skeleton was absolutely a top contender.

By far the most interesting, though not necessarily the automatic winner, was Tag! In the game, it added fifteen points to any skill. Here, it did the same, specifically in the way we would only be able to invest in skills available to a normal Fallout 3 level-up. It was very clear from its description that this would only increase the selected skill a small amount, enough to go from nothing to a bare novice level. I wasn't exactly sure how that would present, but I got the feeling it wasn't going to turn any of us into savants overnight. Still, having everyone suddenly become a bit more knowledgeable in a variety of concepts, and having every soldier in the future have that option as well wasn't nothing.

All three of the options were something I would have liked to have. The flexibility of the Tag! perk was nice, but it was hard to argue with a decrease in radiation or an increase in durability.

"Well, I will have to consider my options," I admitted, shaking my head. "The fact that there isn't a timer means we don't have to go now, and part of me is tempted to wait until I can upgrade the barracks and purchase more soldiers. Adam will likely be back in two or three days..."

I trailed off, leaning back in my chair and contemplating what I should do. After about twenty minutes of sitting alone, my soldiers started to emerge from their rooms, with Carlos and the others bunking in the barracks joining us shortly after.

As they entered, I passed them the quest, letting them read it, though I told them to hold off with what they thought until everyone was awake. Eventually, when everyone was up and had gotten their breakfast, I started the conversation.

"So, for obvious reasons, I am very interested in completing that quest. Any one of those perks would be a significant boost to our capabilities," I said, most of my soldiers nodding in agreement. "The real question is, how long do we wait to tackle it?"

"Are you worried we can't handle it?" Andrew asked with a slight frown. "We've cleared large groups of raiders before."

"With a distinct tactical advantage and the benefit of ambush," I pointed out, before glancing at my first two soldiers. "And the Mart doesn't count, that was just luck."

Both Carlos and Joseph winced at the memory, but I quickly continued. The less time spent dwelling on that particular clusterfuck, the better.

"To answer your question, though? I think ultimately, if we used our heads, we could likely handle it," I admitted, looking around. "Not to toot our own horns, but we have better weapons, armor, equipment, skills, and cohesion. But quantity is a quality of its own, and I'm a strong believer in stacking the deck as much as possible."

"What would we be waiting for?" Leon asked.

"For Adam to return and leave, assuming he buys more than... let's say one and a half thousand caps worth of supplies," I responded. "That would be enough to buy the barracks and a bunch of new soldiers. I would feel a lot more comfortable with a larger fighting force available. Having the ability to do actual maneuvers, like pincers and flanks, would go a long way to improving our capabilities."

"What about some surveillance?" Joseph suggested. "If we find a small place to look out over, we could station a few of us nearby to keep an eye on the entire area. It would be nice to get a feeling for numbers, or at least get the lay of the land."

"That's not a bad idea..." I said, trailing off as I considered the area as I remembered. "We could circle around to the vault entrance, I think that overlooks the town... The water tower does as well, but I'm not sure how stable it is."

We discussed the concept for a few minutes before deciding that we would split off a group of three. They would head out on their own and make their way towards the water tower. If, after a thorough inspection, it turned out to be stable, one of us would climb up and use it as a vantage point. If it wasn't, we would circle around to the vault entrance. We would likely end up on top of the hill that the vault was built into, but either way, we would get a good view of the town.

"Alright, then that's the plan for today," I said with a nod. "Joseph, Leon, and I will head out to try and find a good vantage point. The rest of you can go out scavenging, but don't push yourselves. I don't want you guys taking risks when your numbers are down."

The group nodded in agreement, all of us tucking back into breakfast, a new eagerness to it now that we all had a goal for the day. When we were done, we quickly completed our morning rituals, including armoring up, and I went about a quick inspection of the base before Joseph, Leon, and I left for Springvale.

I was looking forward to getting a better sense of just how challenging this mission would turn out to be.