

For the next few days, the soldiers and I worked hard to complete quests and improve our situation. On the first day, after completing our morning routines, we headed out to explore and loot the reinforced and still-standing homes in the residential area. These buildings were easy, bite-sized chunks of action, with only ghouls and a few dozen rad roaches to watch out for.

After clearing a few houses, we returned to the HQ to pick up our quests. On the first day, we traveled up to the new hunting grounds and killed eight striders, finally completing the quest for our flashlights. The lights were surprisingly powerful for their size, a powerful LED cell providing a blinding amount of light with the click of a button. It had a few intensity settings, as well as a strobe and SOS blinker, and could be focused or diffused by turning the flashlight's head. It came with a mount for our rifle and our helmets, but we ended up clipping them to our helmets for better visibility.

When we returned, I also officially dropped the extra magazine quest. The fact that it specified that we needed to hunt in the clearing was not something I was willing to do, so keeping it in the deck was really just decreasing the odds of something similar coming up. Technically, I had no idea if the quest system worked like that, but since I had no intention of taking the quest, it was better safe than sorry. Even if we were getting pretty low on ammo by that point.

Thankfully, before it could become a genuine concern, Maxwell pointed out that the Standard Soldier's Kit would refresh sometime during the following evening, assuming we stayed inside for the rest of that time. That meant it was time to test out my special workout concept.

After sitting down and considering the details of my idea and how best to take advantage of it, we decided to disassemble our stimpaks, just as we had done to recover from our twenty-two-mile hike. We would then work out until we dropped, with Maxwell administering one-third of the stimpak. After that, we would rinse and repeat until the stimpak was gone. This would essentially give us three extensive, full-day workouts. Far from the crazy, anime protagonist level that I was hoping for, but it was also nothing to sneeze at. As long as we worked hard and repeated the process at the end of every refresh, the effects should eventually accumulate.

I was very interested to see how our increase in strength would combine with Solar Powered. It was a straight increase to our base, meaning that for every bit of improvement I managed to add to my body, a relatively easy process since I was only slightly above average in this new body, that increase towered higher and higher.

It was an enticing enough idea that I considered using a round of non-refilling stimpaks, maybe in a day or two, to repeat the process and potentially solidify or increase our gains.

The following day, with equipment cleaned and all our ammo restocked, we checked our quests with Maxwell. Not only did we have two quests for the day, but we also had two for the previous day, and one incomplete one from the day before. In total, we had six quests, including the quest to meet the tribe for a shotgun.

To try and work down the new quests, and because the reward for one of them was quite nice, we skipped the exploration of the Fallout world and headed immediately into the Horizon world. There, we tracked down and killed another group of watchers before returning home and receiving an extra box of ammo for each of our weapons. Considering how tight Ammo had been during the tail end of the previous refresh, I welcomed the extra source, even if it wasn't in a magazine.

After accepting our reward, we immediately headed straight back in, heading out to explore our new hunting grounds, an exploration quest that had us walking up and around the mountain-side of the broad, shallow river. After rushing home, we received two hundred feet of paracord, a handy resource I'm sure we would get a lot of use out of. It was actually unique as well, coming with a different set of rules. As long as we were using it, not just handing it out or selling it, when the equipment refresh happened, the cord would not disappear from whatever we used it for.

Joseph was already starting to plan out a series of ladders and guides to set up along our climb to our new hunting grounds, making it less dangerous and faster. Personally, I half expected there to be a quest to do that anyway.

The next day, we did a quick patrol of the area, looting a singular home before rushing back to the HQ, immediately grabbing a gathering quest for [Fire Kiln Root](#), something that, between the name and my own memories, I was pretty sure was used in one of the game's resistance potions. We had to gather a great deal of it, but the reward was that our clothes and armor would have increased fire resistance woven into them. The moment I saw this, I was eager to grab it. Between how horrific burns could be, and how many things liked to spew fire in the Capital Wasteland, like ants, robots, and raiders with flamethrowers, being resistant to fire could only be a good thing.

It would also be the first of the upgrades that wasn't a physical object, but rather a sort of... enchantment? Inherent enhancement? Of the kit itself. It made me consider the implications of min-maxing our gear, wondering if I should not take certain rewards to keep "slots" open for future enhancements. It would suck to give our guns the ability to clean themselves at the cost of ammo regeneration or increasing penetration power. I asked Maxwell about it, hoping he would know if that was something I should be concerned about, but he had no idea how it would work.

Gathering the fire kiln root took a good chunk of the day, but it was well worth it. After we returned and completed the quest, we headed right back into the Horizon world, this time on another simple kill quest. The trip up to the hunting grounds *still* sucked, but we managed to get up there, kill our target, and get back home with enough time to rush through dinner and get to bed. The reward for our rush was three standard soldier kits, unassigned and waiting for... well, people to join up. The list of people whom I would let join up was pretty short at the moment, but I wasn't about to pass up three kits that would make it possible. In the worst-case scenario, if I couldn't overcome my distrust of outsiders, I could simply break down the kits and sell them piecemeal. It would be a monumental waste, all things considered, but it was nice to have options.

I would have to be *very* hard-pressed to even consider that option, of course. Each SSK represented the opportunity for someone to officially join our group in a way that would tie them to us in a significant way. The SSK was shaping up to be a substantial amount of potent gear. Not only that, but it was self-repairing, and the ammo and medical equipment would restock. It even *cleaned itself*. The only requirement was that they stayed on friendly terms with us, staying at the HQ long enough for the refresh to happen.

Considering how rare quality gear and honest, consistent work was in the Wasteland, I was willing to bet I could tempt quite a few combat-oriented people, like caravan guards or mercenaries, into joining up.

Again, that didn't mean I was about to hand them out to anyone, even if I wanted to keep them around. They may be perfect for recruiting, but I wouldn't recruit anyone I already didn't trust, at least to a degree.

It made me wonder if the Lone Wanderer was out and about, or if this world would even have a version of them. I could probably find out with a quick trip to Vault 101, but that was a mystery that could wait. This was a "realistic" interpretation of the Fallout world, which meant the Lone Wanderer was more likely to be a squishy teenager doomed to die than the uber-competent super soldier they could be in the game.

The next day, I bit the bullet and we spent another day taking advantage of the stimpak to get in a mega workout. This time, we used native stimpaks, which somehow worked just as well as the ones we had used previously. We had enough by that point that we still had two spares, including the spares we carried and the ones Maxwell kept behind the desk, after using one each for a workout.

It was while we were working out, doing push-ups and jogging around the hall of dark doors, since it was by far the largest room in the HQ, that Carlos had a rather brilliant idea.

"You know... it might be... a good idea... to give Max... one of the standard soldiers kits," He said, pausing his words to pull himself up on an old iron bar we fastened to some shelving with paracord.

"What? Why? He has absolutely no training with weapons," I asked, confusion clear in my voice. "It would be a waste."

Carlos was silent for a long minute as he finished another few pull-ups before dropping down to the floor. Meanwhile, I sat up from my crunches, my abs burning, happy to pause the torture I was putting my body through.

"The rules never said he had to be the one who used the stuff," he responded, stepping over to a bent loop of rebar with a chunk of concrete in the end, an improvised kettlebell. "Just that it refreshes and would disappear from any merchants we sold to. As long as we are staying in on days that our kit refreshes to train and stuff... then we could use his kit without having to worry."

Joseph nearly tripped over the paracord he was using as a jump rope as he considered the idea, his eyes a little wide. I couldn't help but snort and shake my head.

"Not sure if it will work, but it's definitely worth a try," I said with a shrug. "Way to think outside the box, Carlos."

"Yes, sir."

The rest of the workout ground out like a kidney stone, with the only bright spots being when Maxwell would come in and administer our one-third shot of stimpak. We would instantly recover from the intense workout, our bodies getting a few minutes of relief, before we immediately set our noses back to the grindstone.

Eventually, when the three stimpaks we had modified were empty, we finally called it a day and headed back to the main hall. Maxwell was cleaning the floors, having not much else to do after we went over the quests. I ended up tossing two more, the entities seeming determined to offer me things that would make the nearby tribes my enemies. Since I wanted to avoid that if at all possible, taking a quest to steal some of their weapons and burn down their bridges was not going to work.

It was still relatively early in the day, so we ended up taking another quest, this one to kill ten ghouls. The reward was an upgrade to the standard soldier's kit, specifically the helmet. It ensured that the faceplate would never be dirty or fogged up. Mud, water, frost, blood, and condensation would all simply slide off of it, no matter how thick it was caked on. Considering our helmets were already pretty comfortable, removing one of the major reasons for taking them off was definitely a plus in my book. Unfortunately, this did not protect from actual damage, so if someone managed to carve a line or scratch something, we would have to wait for the refresh.

When we returned from the quest, I suggested that Maxwell try to take the standard soldier's kit. He was honestly surprised by the idea, and after explaining the thought process to him, he reluctantly agreed.

To my complete surprise, the kit accepted him, a full kit appearing in his room. We quickly divided up his ammo, leaving the boxes behind for later use. We also left the more tool-oriented items, like the knife, paracord, and flashlight, with him, as well as the stimpak. He also had his rifle and a single mag, though he did not seem very eager to use it, or even touch it.

"Next time the refresh is coming along, we will take you to the Horizon world and you can run through a mag or two for practice," I said, nearly as an order. "You should at least be passingly familiar with the weapons we use."

He winced but nodded before all of us ate a quick dinner and headed to bed. The following morning, after getting ready for the day, we approached the desk as usual, quickly revealing our new quests.

As of that moment, between rushing through quests, dropping several, and also taking two days off to train our bodies, we had a total of five quests awaiting completion, including the two new ones. First was the shotgun option for our primary, in exchange for going to meet the nearby tribe. On top of that, we had two kill quests, one for [scrappers](#) and the other for [chargers](#), two zoomorphs that were more dangerous than the ones we had been hunting up until that point.

The first new quest for the day was to walk around the entire lake, the one at the end of the river, which I had only been to once. In return, our maps of the Horizon world would receive a substantial upgrade. I was curious as to what the entities considered to be "substantial", but judging from what they considered to be basic, it would likely be impressive.

All of these quests were interesting, but it was the final one, the last new one revealed, that really caught my eye. The reward was significant, with a description so long that the quest parchment actually unfolded to reveal almost a whole separate page of extra text. The two most important points, however, were pretty easy to understand. The first was a new building, a medical facility that constantly generated medical supplies, including stimpaks. The second was a new class of soldier, the combat medic. Either one of them would have been a huge boon, but together they were practically irresistible.

Of course, nothing worth anything was easy. In order to get that reward, we would have to kill a [Sawtooth](#). One of the major zoomorphs designed *specifically* to hunt and kill humans.