

Before I could elaborate on how I wanted to go about looting the building and town, one of Jackson's men raised their hand, catching my attention.

"Sir, we found something you might want to look at," he said. "We found a tunnel..."

I frowned, trying to figure out what he was referring to, only for my eyes to go wide. In the game, the raiders had been attempting to dig into the vault and ended up punching into a [giant ant nest](#). Memories of the giant ants jumped into my mind, and I cursed, my grip tightening on my weapon.

"Johnson, coordinate with the people outside, get them into a position to watch the town. Lock down the area and settle in," I said, my tone shifting dramatically. "Joseph, Carlos, Kelsey, Leon, you're with me. We might have an ant issue."

Johnson nodded, immediately shifting to serious mode. He turned to the rest of the men and started throwing out orders to the rest of my soldiers, getting them into position. Meanwhile, my new group followed me, while I followed the guy who had raised his hand. We moved at a jog, cutting through the school quickly, eventually descending down the lower floors.

"What do you mean that we might have an 'ant issue?'" Joseph asked as he followed closely behind me. "I assume you don't mean normal ants, sir."

"No, the dumbass raiders here were trying to get into Vault 101," I explained, peaking down a corridor as we passed. "They accidentally dug into a giant ant nest, and it completely fucking slipped my mind."

"Can't expect you to remember everything," Carlos pointed out. "How many ants?"

"In the game, this area is right next to where you start off," I explained. "None of the enemies are really that much of a threat. But, considering what we just had to deal with... There is probably more than just a few ants. There might be *thousands*."

My people uttered various curses as we continued to move, eventually stopping by a closed door. I had Johnson's soldier hang back, with instructions to run back and get more people if shit went sideways. Meanwhile, we stacked up at the door. I shared a look with Carlos before giving him the signal.

The soldier pushed the door open, and together we moved in, sweeping into the room. When nothing terrible jumped out at us, we focused on the giant hole dug into the floor.

"Any hints, sir?" Carlos asked as we all looked down into the tunnel.

"Aim for the head, stay away from the pincers," I said with a frown. "Dammit, I wish I remembered more about this. If I say run, don't ask questions, just fucking run."

"So we are going in?" Leon asked, still looking down into the pit.

"Yeah, we have to," I responded. "It might be nothing, or we might be sitting on a powder keg filled with a few thousand deadly ants. We need to know if Megaton is about to be overrun by a pissed-off nest."

"Well... we will lead in," Joseph said, with Carlos nodding in agreement a moment later.

Together, the two moved forward, the rest of us following behind, descending under the ground. The tunnel was surprisingly big, taller than us by a good few feet, and continued on for a while. Thankfully, the raiders were at least smart enough to light it properly. Eventually, we reached a split, and we investigated both directions. Thankfully, we quickly discovered that both avenues were dead ends. After inspecting the walls and making sure we hadn't missed anything, we made our way back.

"We must be before they crack into the nest," I responded with a frown as we climbed back out of the tunnel, turning around to look back. "Or maybe the nest is deeper. Everything is slightly bigger and different here, so maybe the tunnel would need to be deeper or further."

"How worried about this are we?" Kelsey asked, idly kicking a rock down the incline into the tunnel.

"Well... Greyditch might still be a functional town if we are definitely before certain things start to happen," I said, scratching the thick stubble starting to grow on my face. "Some dumbass starts messing with the ants and turns them into fire-breathing monsters. They are a serious, real threat. Beyond that... if the nest isn't connected here, then there is a chance we are good for now."

"For now?" Joseph asked. "Not sure I like the sounds of that."

"For now is the definition of where we are at," I countered, shaking my head. "There are a lot of issues that we need to look out for, things that are fine for now but later..."

We left the room behind, closing the door, though I wasn't sure that would do any good. When we returned to the front hall, I found that Johnson had gotten our snipers on the roof and that our LMG gunners had taken up positions on the second-floor windows.

"We gonna live?" Johnson asked when he spotted us. When I nodded, he continued. "Good, now why the hell are ants such a big deal?"

"There are some rather large, dangerous ants here," I explained, miming something that came up to my hip. "I remembered that, in the game, there was a tunnel under the school that led to a nest. Considering numbers are a bit higher here, I was worried we had thousands of them about to come say hello."

"Damn, alright," he accepted. "Since I don't see a wave of bugs following after you, I'm guessing that's not gonna happen?"

"Not yet, at least," I responded. "They hadn't broken into the nest yet. No idea how close they are, though. Or how we would actually deal with that many ants at once."

"Fire, lots of fire."

"Yeah... wait till I tell you about the ones who *breathe* fire."

Despite the concern of the moment, we quickly buttoned down and got to work. We had loot to gather, and a little scare of potentially being overrun by thousands of deadly ants built like great danes wasn't going to stop us.

First, we went room by room in the school, clearing out every nook and cranny of anything worth selling or keeping. Guns, ammo, books, medical supplies, and miscellaneous things were all divided up into separate piles. Most of the misc pile, which consisted of booze, interesting tech, and other things I thought might sell, was immediately packed into bags and hauled away. Johnson left with five people, hauling bags stuffed with junk to Megaton. I had explained to him that I wanted him to sell it to whoever was willing to buy it quick and easily. There were probably at least seven to eight hundred caps of value, but I told him to accept anything above five hundred.

While he was gone, everyone who was left, who wasn't on overwatch at least, moved on to looting the town. There we went, building by building, street by street, stripping down the raiders and clearing it out by sections. While searching in the town, we didn't bother grabbing most of the minor miscellaneous things, as it wasn't worth the effort to haul home. We did gather anything worth money, like booze, and store them in the most secure space I could think of.

In one of the rotted, disgusting-smelling houses.

Any person in their right mind would run with their tail between their legs from the horrors that filled those buildings, but the second floor of one of them actually had a few clear spots. We carefully moved a good amount of goods into the bathtub, maybe five hundred caps of transportable, stable things, before continuing to clear the town.

Eventually, once Johnson had returned and both the town and school were cleared, it was time to start packing up. Any broken weapons and junk medical supplies were broken further, at least as necessary, and stuffed into bags. Meanwhile, anything still in working order was more carefully packed away. We also stuffed a whole lot of books into backpacks. There were quite a few surviving books, especially the books that the kids were learning from, throughout the school. While elementary school textbooks might not seem valuable, considering just how uneducated the world was after the apocalypse, just one of the textbooks could change a lot.

I made a note to be on the lookout for more schools, to gather up more textbooks. I knew the Brotherhood of Steel loved their books in the game, but I had no idea if that would be true here, too.

In total, we filled eleven or so bags full of soon-to-be-scraped and recycled supplies, plus a few more stuffed with things we would be keeping. Once it was all secured, we shouldered our backpacks, grabbed our duffel bags, and headed out, those not laden with heavy cargo on high alert, looking out into the wastes for incoming threats.

The trip back was tense, and we were forced to push ourselves a bit in order to arrive home before the sun started to set. We made it, however, safely sealed inside our walls as the sky turned dark. Rather than immediately start throwing everything down the scrap chutes, we stored it in the secure storage and sat down in the main hall. Maxwell was waiting for us, with the quest paper in hand.

"Congratulations, Sir, on successfully clearing Springvale of raiders," He said, handing me the quest sheet. "Any thoughts on what reward you will pick?"

"While Tag is tempting," I admitted, frowning slightly that I had to make such a difficult choice. "Survivability is key here. Skills can be learned, as long as you live long enough to do so. Adamantium skeleton will make surviving a hell of a lot easier, especially in melee."

I shared a look with Johnson, trying to gauge if he agreed. Judging by his thumbs up and nod, he did.

After selecting the perk, I handed the page back to Maxwell, who accepted it with a smile.

"Good choice," He responded, before heading back to the desk to submit the paper.

With my choice made and the sun setting, we gathered around the main hall to enjoy dinner. When everyone was sitting, most of us holding glasses filled with the lemonade drink mixed with vodka, I stood up. My soldiers quieted, and I smiled.

"I think a toast is in order," I said, raising my glass. "This operation marks a significant step up for our group. And to complete it without any losses is a significant achievement. Thank you all for your hard work."

I raised my glass, and we all cheered, each of us sipping the celebratory drink, before settling in to eat.

The following morning, I quickly decided that we would take a day off from anything too strenuous. I had soldiers walking the perimeter, clearing some of the trash still within our wall, and a few other minor tasks, but for the most part, it was a day to recover from the stressful day we had had clearing Springvale. At night, we celebrated again, drinking lightly and eating some of our various fresh food with our normal rations.

We had honest-to-God mashed potatoes, made with brahmin butter and salt, the latter of which we had brought back with us. The butter was bought in Megaton as Johnson was selling our wares. It wasn't cheap, especially with how much he bought, but watching each of our soldiers enjoy heaping piles of buttery mashed potatoes was well worth it.

I put upgrading the grow house and our food quality again on my to-do list relatively soon. They have definitely earned it.

After a break and celebration, we woke up the next morning and finally got around to feeding everything to the machines, watching as the surplus of resources for both the armory

and the medbay skyrocketed. When we were done, we had enough medical surplus to create one and a half times the amount of goods we last sold to Adam, as well as enough weapon stock to double the weapons we had just sold.

When we were done, we were sitting on around seven thousand potential caps, with five hundred already sitting in the vault. The only problem was that we already knew that Megaton wouldn't be able to absorb that many resources at once. We were already saturating the medical market, and that many guns would be very difficult to offload. Hell, *carrying* those guns was going to be difficult.

"We need transportation," I said as we gathered for lunch. My men were spread out across the main hall, with Carlos, Joseph, and Johnson sitting with me. "This place is huge, and we are only *just* starting to scratch the surface."

"We could likely trade for some brahim," Joseph pointed out. "Though I don't know if we have any idea how to take care of them."

"You got a lot of shiny magic going on around here," Johnson pointed out. "It's letting you build an army from nothing. But an army isn't shit if it can't get to the fight. There is *something* to get us around in here."

"It would make sense for the system to provide transportation at some point," I agreed, running my hand through my hair with a frown. "Question is, how deep do we have to go before we get it?"

"We need to know where we are going first," Johnson pointed out. "Send me down to Megaton with a few guns and some medical supplies. I'll sell what I can and have a chat with Mr. Caleb from the gun shop. See if we can't figure out where his friends are."

"That's a fair point, and the extra caps will make trying to find what sort of transportation the system has a bit easier," I added. "Take a duffel from the armory and one from the medbay, sell what you can. Go heavy on the ammo, we have a big surplus after yesterday, and we haven't sold any of that yet."

"What are we going to be doing in the meantime?" Carlos asked.

"We are going to be making a visit to the Horizon world," I responded, leaning forward in my seat. "In the game, the main character had a way to make mounts from some of the less dangerous zoomorphs. Not sure if it's possible, and I don't remember how she does it, but I want to ask around, see if Oakanrest has any ideas. While we are there, we can do some light trading as well."

"Sounds like a plan," Johnson nodded.

"Should probably travel light," I pointed out. "No need for any special weaponry."

Johnosn nodded, and after a quick announcement that breakfast was now timed, we dug in. Around an hour later, Johnson gathered his squad and explained their mission. He had

already gathered two bag's worth of trade goods, a pittance compared to what we usually brought. When he was done with the abridged briefing, they marched out, leaving me to explain what we were going to be doing to my squad.

After that, we packed up our own bag of trade goods before we headed to the dark room and stepped into the Horizon world. The first step into the green, vibrant forest was kind of staggering, an overload of colors after so many days in the Fallout world.

"Alright, everyone, I'm hoping to get this done in a day, which means we are going to have to move pretty fast," I said. "We will rotate the people to the front, forcing their way through the underbrush, which should make things easier. Ready?"

As everyone nodded, I led the group from our wooden log palisade into the forest, taking the first round as the trail leader.