

Waking up bright and early the next morning, all of my soldiers gathered in the main hall to discuss and plan our coming assault. Or first decision? Attacking now, or under the cover of darkness.

"Our Solar Powered perk is a significant buff," I pointed out. "Between that and our armor layers, we should all but dominate any close quarters conflict, even with just a bare minimum of training."

"I'm not disagreeing," Johnson responded. "Just don't underestimate the advantage of a surprise attack at night. There's a reason we do night watches at most military bases, and these chuckleheads don't strike me as the careful type."

For a moment, I consider asking whether we should set up a night watch, but I put it off for the time being. I had other things to focus on at the moment, and our walls would do for now. When we returned, I would bring up the possibility.

"They aren't. In fact, I'm willing to bet the only people who will be awake if we attack at night will be the people wired on chems to sleep," I responded with a frown. "But a night ambush means a significant drop in our own capabilities as well. We don't have night vision, and while a flashlight might blind our target, it also makes anyone using one a beacon."

Johnson frowned, nodding in understanding as I spoke.

"Understood, sir. A day raid makes a certain kind of sense in that case," he pointed out. "Suppose I'm used to a little more tech at my fingertips."

"It's fine. So, a daytime raid," I said, standing up and leaning over the map of the surrounding area.

I definitely hadn't forgotten about the map we earned as a reward, and Maxwell definitely didn't have to remind me that they existed. He was sworn to secrecy either way, but I certainly owed him for pointing it out. He did so before anyone else had woken up, pulling out the rolled parchment so I could set it up.

When we had set the map out on the tables, which had to be pushed together to make enough room, I was once again caught off guard by how it looked. Despite being on paper, it functioned like a touchpad, letting me zoom in and out with my hands, as well as move around to shift its focus. Further, I distinctly remember that the only thing marked had been the headquarters, but now nearly a dozen landmarks had been labeled, including Megaton, the Superduper Mart, the water tower, and more.

Since we decided our attack would happen during the day, I dragged the map focus to Springvale and centered it, locking the view so it wouldn't move.

"We have four M40's at our disposal, and we have two high points, so it makes sense to put two on each one," I said, taking some white plastic poker chips marked with a [crosshair](#) from a pile at the corner of the table. "Two on the hill where Vault 101 is, and another two in the water

tower. Between both groups, they should have a considerable view of the town. It's not perfect, but it's pretty good."

I dropped two of the chips on the map, pushing them to the water tower, doing the same to the rocky hill that ran along the town, where Vault 101 was built.

"We can spend some time making the perfect sniper's perch," Joseph pointed out. Sandbags, digging out a slight shallow, maybe some extra camouflage..."

"That sounds fine. We can attack later in the day, as long as it's still actually in the day," I said, nodding in agreement. "Once our snipers are ready, we can circle around and attack from the opposite side."

I placed a pile of seven plastic caps on the lower side of Springvale, opposite Megaton, then another seven plastic chips on the higher end. All of the chips, in each pile, were labeled in permanent marker to designate what role the soldier it represented could do. In each group, one was labeled with a star, two with a medical cross, two with a simple "S" drawn on them, and two with "LMG". Before I could continue, Johnson leaned forward, another cigar in his mouth, glowing slightly at the end.

I had no idea where he was getting them at this point.

"Sir, you don't move around light machinegunners, you pick a spot and plant them," he explained, picking up two of the LMG chips from the pile that represented his squad. "It's all about laying down so much lead that the enemy forgets how to stand up. You plant your boots somewhere pretty and choke the field with fire, cause they are too damn slow to move around if you get caught out."

I frowned but nodded, looking back at the map, chewing the inside of my cheek. Eventually, I nodded and reached out to exchange two of the LMG chips on the table for normal S chips. Now each group only had one chip marked LMG.

"In that case, let's leave two of the LMGs behind," I said, tapping the corner of the table as I considered my options. "We need more firepower in our moving teams, or I'm worried they might get overwhelmed if they run into too many raiders at once. The two LMGs we do bring... here."

The large rocky hill that the vault was buried under ran along the town, before flattening out as a raised section. It was lower than the high point of the hill, and it had only a few residential buildings on it, but all but a few of them were ruined. I placed the two LMG chips there, where they had a decent view of the town, specifically the area we would be pushing into at the start of our raid.

"The LMGs go with the group coming from this angle. Once the area is clear, they can set up here and lay down covering fire for our initial push," I said, gesturing along the town. "Then they move to this new position so they can aim down the main road, see over a lot of the houses that are still standing, and fire into the ones that aren't."

"Then, with them in place, the two teams of six push into the town and sweep across, pushing towards Megaton," I continued, pushing the two piles into town. "That puts pressure on the stragglers, forcing them against the fire angles of the M40s."

It wasn't perfect, but with the number of people we had, there was no real way to make it perfect. As far as I could see, this was a solid plan.

"Not bad, probably about the best we can do with what we got," Sergeant Johnson confirmed with a nod, unknowingly agreeing with my thoughts. "What about the school?"

"The LMGs can keep them from shooting out what few windows aren't blocked off, same with the M40s," I responded. "We push in once the town is safe, then clear it from room to room."

"Simple, effective, but it's gonna be gritty," he pointed out. "Not much we can do about it, just going to have to make it work."

We continued planning for another hour, filling in whatever holes we could before finishing our breakfast. I went to the armory to switch out the appropriate loadouts. There wasn't much point in planning who got what, as all of my soldiers, bar Johnson, had the same level of experience downloaded into their heads. Really, the only thing I needed to worry about was not changing a medic's loadout. They carried enough as it was, and I wanted them to stick with the main group.

So, after double-checking that it would work, I gave Madison and Stewart the M40s and Andrew the LMG. After that, I gave Johnson's team their new weapons as well, using the soldiers he had described. About twenty minutes later, the two squads were gathered, armed, and ready.

"Alright, you all know the plan, you help us make it after all," I said, looking at my men, my back to the front entrance. "I want everyone focused and ready. This is the largest challenge we've faced so far, and I want it to be clean. Be careful, stay safe, and kick ass."

"Oorah!" Johnson shouted, and the rest of my men repeated the call a moment later.

Together, the two squads left the safety of our walls and headed down the path towards Megaton. The tension in the group was tight like a drum, but my soldiers were handling it, staying vigilant and watching the streets for any threats. We only had to pause a few times as we marched, so we made pretty decent time.

Eventually, we reached the rising hill behind the Mart, and after a moment to collect ourselves, we began to climb. My team headed past the water tower while Johnson's squad stopped, dropping off his snipers. They started carrying sandbags up the ladder, which we stole from a sand wall barrier that was built along one of the streets we passed on the way. They had enough to make a slight protective shelter, making their spots considerably safer.

When they were done, Johnson would lead his men back down the hill and around to get into position. Meanwhile, my squad, plus the LMG guy from Johnson's squad, continued on,

making a wide loop around the town. We ended up passing another water tower, but this one was nearly completely decrepit and not usable as a sniper's nest.

Eventually, we found the road that led back towards the fault and then the town, before starting to circumnavigate the large hill. When we reached the top, our two snipers crawled to a nearby ledge, confirming they had a great angle over the decent-sized town. The rest of us stayed back as they carefully set up a perch, moving rocks and setting up cover to do so. When they were ready, Madison turned back and gave me a thumbs up, which I returned before we started moving on.

It took us another ten minutes of walking to get into position, down behind the ridge where the LMG soldiers would be stationed. We didn't know if there were raiders up on this part of the town, but we would need to clear it just in case. Thankfully, there were only a handful of standing homes, meaning we could do it pretty quickly. If we were forced to abandon stealth, we would have to get going quickly before we pushed the situation too far to stick to our original plan.

I was not looking to improvise when we had no real way to communicate with the other squad.

After a few minutes of waiting, we pushed up to the higher street, staying low and taking cover behind a pair of burnt-out houses. We then pushed around and entered one of the still-standing homes, all of us pouring inside, guns ready.

The interior was a mess, with the furniture thrown everywhere, most of it broken beyond recognition. A god-awful stench came from deeper inside the ruined home, nearly knocking us off our feet. At first glance, it appeared this place had been ransacked by someone, potentially the raiders, and then used as a dumping ground or, possibly, an outhouse, maybe both. If our helmets filtered out some of the stench, I couldn't imagine how badly it would smell without them.

I couldn't picture anyone with functioning legs staying in the first home, but we still needed to run through it. After quickly confirming that it was clear and that I was correct in my assumption that they used it as an outhouse, we moved on. We quickly checked the other houses, finding that all of them were like that. Rotting brahim, shit, organs and dead bodies, plus the broken husks of a few robots, and a few horrible piles of trash were all we could find. We quickly sealed the houses back up and left them behind, finding a vantage point for Andrew and his compatriot from Johnson's squad.

We ended up stationing them by a collapsed house, specifically a large pile of bricks that was once a chimney. It was waist-high, giving them plenty of cover and a great view of the town. We waited for a few minutes while they set up, during which I used my monocular to investigate the main part of the town. As before, there were many raiders scattered throughout, with quite a few gathered around the main street stores. From this angle, I could see a few fire pits, as well as a few barrel fires, though most of them were out.

Eventually, when the LMG gunners were set up, there was nothing left to do but start the party. We gave it twenty minutes to let Johnson's group find their position, though they likely already had. I did my best not to actively curse our lack of communication options while we waited. When the time was up, I turned to my soldiers.

"Pick your targets, focus on anyone with guns, and let's try and clear space for us to move in," I said quietly, both Carlos and Joseph nodding from my left and right. "Johnson should be right over the ridge, ready to charge in with us."

The five soldiers who remained from my eight-person squad found various firing points, standing, crouching, and lying down. I took up my own position beside Andrew, patting his back before lining up a shot on a group of raiders. I could feel everyone waiting for me, and after letting out a long breath, I steadied myself and opened fire.

When my first shot rang out, the raider I was targeting, who was about a hundred meters away, enjoying a cigarette, dropped with a bloody hole in his side. Immediately, a wave of gunfire poured out from around me. The soldiers with M4s fired single rounds at a time, picking targets and shooting slowly to make sure each bullet counted. Meanwhile, the LMGs fired in slow bursts, tearing through targets, usually multiples.

About fifteen seconds after we opened fire, Johnson's squad did as well, coming out of cover three or four hundred meters away, only their muzzle flashes visible from our angle. Over all of that, the loud crack of M40 rounds taking out specific targets echoed over the town, our snipers picking off people closer to their side and moving forward.

As I reloaded, storing my empty mag, I scanned the area below and ahead of us for movement. When no living raiders appeared, I turned to our two LMG soldiers.

"Cover us, we are pushing forward."

Andrew nodded, as did his compatriot, and I moved out of cover, staying as low as possible. My soldiers moved with me, the LMGs firing in longer bursts now as they hosed down buildings and cover, keeping the raiders from taking us out as we moved. All six of us crawled, slid, and crouch walked down the hill to the streets below, all of us finding cover. Luckily, there weren't any cars parked in the driveways or stacked up along the roads. A quick check showed that Johnson's squad was moving up as well, pushing into cover and engaging the raiders.

We were in position, all that was left was to push through the town.