

We spent a few minutes walking through various alleys and paths of the mismatched town before eventually asking a guard about cheap places to stay. After explaining that we were here for trade and that most of our goods had already been sold, he said there was a cleared space along the exterior for caravans and traveling merchants, and that it was free, though we would need to pay for amenities. I thanked him for his time with two caps, which he happily accepted.

"Was paying him really necessary?" Joseph asked as we oriented ourselves towards the exit and started walking. "He had already told you. And it's kind of his job to direct people."

"Never underestimate the power of the people in charge liking you," I said, passing on something I had learned over and over again through school, college, and work. "People will bend over backwards for people they like. Today, this meant nothing, but in three months, when we've been visiting for a while and start to make a name for ourselves? We will hopefully have a reputation for treating people agreeably, respecting their time, paying well, and always honoring our debts. The best part is that, in most circumstances, all we have to do is be nice and understanding."

"...Are you sure that's the right message to send?" John asked from slightly behind me. "This world is rough, right? If we roll over and play the meek kind mercenaries, won't people take advantage of us?"

"Do you plan on being meek?" I asked, looking over my shoulder with a raised eyebrow.

"No, Sir, of course not."

"Then I have to assume that people will only make that mistake a few times before we prove them wrong," I pointed out. "Kindness doesn't mean weakness, no matter if people have forgotten that here or not."

I led the group out of the front entrance and around to the southern side of the walls. We passed several homes and buildings before finally arriving at a sort of half-walled-off campsite, with pens for brahmin, pits for fires, and benches for sitting around said fires, as well as simple shelter structures, which were little more than open-faced boxes to keep rain and snow off tents or whatever other shelters people brought with them.

We settled in happily, paying for some burnable wood and scrap so that we could have a fire when it got dark out. Five caps got us a bucket full, so I splurged and got two. We could have technically survived fine without it, since at this point we were more or less trained to sleep with the sun, but it was clear that they expected some sort of purchase with staying there, and since we had our own food and water, firewood was all I was willing to buy.

Since it was still light out, we settled around on the benches, taking off our packs and helmets. While we were technically outside, there were plenty of building guard positions around that I felt comfortable unwinding slightly, letting my people do the same. I even pulled a bottle of whiskey, which I had held back from our sales. It was small enough that, as long as we shared

it, nobody would be overly intoxicated, and since the sun was still up, most of that would wear off before it got completely dark.

As we sat down, my soldiers chatting and passing the bottle around, I pulled open my pack and grabbed one of the boxes of vault suits. According to Moira, whom I had no reason not to trust, the suits were at least knife-resistant and rad-resistant, both of which were good reasons for us to wear them under everything. However, before I forced everyone to add them to their uniforms, I was going to field-test them myself.

I pulled out one of the suits, grabbed my knife, and as we sat around the empty fire pit, talking and relaxing, I slowly stripped the suit of everything but the base blue underlayer. I started by cutting the free metal sensors clipped to the chest, along with the wires, before carefully cutting the stitching of the [yellow reflective material](#). It was slow work, but eventually I removed the 113 on the back, along with the leather cuffs, belt, and anything else.

When I was done, all that was left was the blue jumpsuit, which was made of a reinforced material that I couldn't identify, not that I thought I should. As I was double-checking that I got everything, Carlos spoke up.

"We really going to wear those under our BDUs, Sir?" he asked with a raised eyebrow. "Seems like just another layer."

"If it's comfortable and works, then yes, absolutely. That's why I'm testing them out first," I explained, turning the jumpsuit over in my hands, looking for anything I missed or any issues. "I will be testing if it's comfortable tonight and tomorrow. Once we get home, we can test durability by stabbing it a bunch and shooting it a few times."

While my soldiers got the fire started, I retreated to one of the scrap shelters to strip down to my underwear, pulling the deconstructed vault suit on. I wasn't going to admit it, but one of the reasons I was so eager to put on the suit, beyond the practicalities of testing it for future use, was that I also just wanted to know what it felt like to wear a vault suit.

I had been playing characters walking around in the for years, after all, how could I not be curious?"

After I zipped up the suit and did a little shimmy to get it all settled, I ran through a series of stretches to test out the flexibility and range of motion, which I was happy to find was nearly perfect. The suits were supposedly one-size-fits-all, and while there was a bit of tightness in some extreme stretches, for the most part, I had a full range of motion.

I quickly put on the rest of my clothes, starting with my BDUs and then my armor, before returning to the ring of benches. The fire was beginning to grow, and the light was spreading around the group.

"How does it feel?" Madison asked, screwing the cap back on a bottle of water.

"Pretty good actually," I admitted, flexing a bit for show. "Flexible enough, comfortable enough. The real test will be the walk home tomorrow, but I'm optimistic."

As the sun set and darkness overtook the town, we broke out our rations and quickly ate our dinner before we piled into the scrap structures to sleep. Our options weren't exactly great, and I ended up passing around the vault suits, still sealed, to serve as our pillows. I made a mental note to look into getting some basic equipment, like sleeping bags.

"We really are spoiled," Carlos admitted, sounding annoyed. "I would kill to be back in our beds."

"Not much we can do about it," I responded, lying on my back, looking up at the rusted scrap roof. "Just get what sleep that you can. We won't be doing anything but walking home tomorrow, so we can rest after that."

After some adjusting and struggling, we all managed to find some relatively comfortable spots. Joseph agreed to keep the first watch, and we would switch around until it was time to go.

Thankfully, the night passed without incident. I had last watch, waking up a few hours before it was time to leave. I passed the time by sitting by the barely burning embers of our campfire, throwing scraps of our MRE trash in, both to clean up and to stave off boredom. When the sun was high enough, and the town was starting to come alive around us, I dumped the rest of the trash and poked everyone away.

"Alright, I want to head around to the gate before following the road away from the town," I said. "Once we are out of sight, we can cut away and head towards home. The fewer people who know what direction we go in, the better."

We quickly got ready, ate a quick snack, and then headed towards the main entrance into the heart of Megaton. Once there, I approached the guard, recognizing the same older woman who had greeted us the day before.

"What do you want?" She asked brusquely, raising her eyebrow. "I remember you from yesterday."

"Hello again, yes, we passed through yesterday. I was just curious, have any vault dwellers been through here recently?" I asked. "We are looking to set up trade with a vault."

"Vault dwellers?" She repeated, looking at me like I was crazy. "No, never heard nothing about them. 101 is still sealed up tight, last I heard."

"Right. Well, thanks for your time," I said, passing her a few caps, which she took wordlessly.

"Happy to help," she responded, sliding the money into her pocket. "You guys going to be back?"

"Who knows," I answered with a shrug. "See you around!"

I left her and her comrade there on the road, returning to my people and leading them down the road, leaving Megaton behind. We were considerably lighter now, with nothing but our new suits and caps weighing us down. Once we were out of sight of the city, true to my words, we cut off the road and headed up and over the hill, then down to the SuperDuper-Mart.

The return trip home was stressful due to our cargo, but ultimately uneventful. We knew exactly where we were going, and while we were nervous about people following us because of our precious cargo, we returned home uninterrupted. After bringing all the caps downstairs to the secure storage room, specifically the safe, we returned to the main hall, where we collapsed among various tables.

"Welcome back," Maxwell greeted, handing out bottles of water to everyone. "Was your trip successful, sir?"

"Yeah, you could say that," I commented. "Managed to make four thousand caps. Should be plenty to get what I was hoping to get done, done, as well as a few extras."

We spent a bit recovering from our walk back before I stood up and grabbed the control tablet for the HQ.

"Alright. First up is the grow hut," I said, scrolling through the options before selecting the purchase.

I quickly stood and made my way to the front desk, where Maxwell was already setting up the map. I promptly placed the grow hut east of the barracks and north of the market. I then immediately used the tablet to select the wall creation tool. We had spent way too long out in the open, and even if it meant wasting money later, when we needed more space or wanted to shift things around, I was going to seal us inside a protective wall.

It took a few minutes to plan the wall, but eventually I had it [drawn out how I wanted](#). A quick purchase, followed by a few installed gates, and we finally had some proper barriers up. In total, the grow hut and the walls cost us seven hundred and fifty caps, but in my mind, it was well worth it.

"Let's see how they turned out," I said, snagging the tablet as I walked through the main hall, my soldiers getting up to follow us out.

As we stepped out into the wasteland, I could immediately see the new walls. Surrounding the HQ area, including the various HQ buildings, was an eight-foot wall of concrete rubble, stacked and worked together. The chunks ranged from cinder-blocks to golf-cart-sized chunks of buildings, all stacked together, with a viscous-looking, sharpened rebar tangle at the top. I jogged over to the wall, grabbing a random chunk and giving it a yank, nodding when it didn't budge.

"That's not going to be very difficult to climb," Joseph pointed out as he caught up. "What does the other side look like?"

"Let's find out," I responded, following the wall to the nearest entrance.

Where the wall was concrete rubble, the entrances were [sweeping scrap-metal gates](#). I could see at least a dozen different sources of metal, all welded together with crude hinges and a chunky locking mechanism between the door halves. After pushing it open, I walked around to examine the exterior of the wall.

"Well... It's a bit better," I commented, tilting my head as I looked. "But we will have to upgrade it eventually if we want some real serious protection, but this will do for now."

While not completely covered with hand- and footholds, the exterior was not nearly smooth enough to stop people from climbing. Still, it was considerably better than nothing and would stop things like ghoul hordes, animals, and roving robots in their tracks. Not to mention that the mess of sharpened rebar at the top would *not* be easy to get over intact.

After examining the wall for a few more minutes, we headed back inside, crossing the now enclosed space to where I had placed the grow hut. It was a simple building, almost reminding me of a large chicken coop. As we stepped inside, we found a room with grow lamps and around a dozen plant boxes. It was a rough setup, but a quick inspection of its tablet showed that the room would generate a certain amount of food daily. At the moment, it was stuck with wasteland vegetarian staples, rads included, but that could change with future upgrades.

It was also where we could purchase upgrades to our daily food rations, both in quality and quantity. I read through everything, and eventually I shook my head.

"Okay, everyone out, and face back towards the HQ," I said, waving my soldiers back. "This is not good enough, I'm going to upgrade it again."

"Sir, are you sure?" Joseph asked. "We would appreciate the better food, but is it worth the money?"

"One, I'm eating the same crap you are, and I'm ready to burn everything down for some decent food," I said as we walked out of the building. "And not only will the facility be able to produce radiation-free, non-mutated food with an upgrade, but it can also make our rations actually be enjoyable. It's well worth the three hundred and seventy-five caps, especially since we could make it back selling high-quality food."

He nodded in understanding, and as we all looked away, I upgraded the building and purchased our ration upgrades. In total, the upgrade and improvements cost six hundred caps, well worth the price in my opinion. After all, my soldiers were putting themselves in serious danger at my command, the least I could do was give them a halfway decent meal.

With the upgrades, we could now have three full meals a day and one snack, or an equivalent amount. We also now had nearly two dozen foods to choose from, and best of all, they would actually taste halfway decent.

We waited for a long moment before turning to look at the grow hut, which was technically the first upgraded building we had. The building itself was larger, with an exterior that

was noticeably less scrappy-looking and more secure, like it wouldn't blow over in a stiff breeze. Inside, we had another half dozen growing pots. After walking around for a minute, I made a few quick selections as to what the building would be passively growing.

When I was done fiddling with the grow house's settings, we headed back to the HQ. It was lunch time, and we had a whole new menu to enjoy.