AN UNOFFICIAL FALLOUT 2D20 ADVENTURE

FOUR IN THE DUST

Radio Edition - a complete GM field guide for four Level 3 characters



Arizona frontier reference artwork supplied by the GM.

Arizona, 2277 | Mojave frontier | 3-4 hours | 4 players

Using This Book

This Radio Edition treats the GM-supplied opening chapter, finished swamp trunks, and Sunny Mayfield broadcast as the authoritative material. The adventure is written so the players believe Dr. Thomas Heckelberg is their only hope until the Vault finale proves otherwise.

Table Fact	GM Answer
System	Fallout: The Roleplaying Game (2d20)
Setting	Arizona, 2277 - an alternate Mojave frontier where neither power won decisively
Length	3-4 hours for the core route; Red Rocket and extra Safford scenes are optional
Opening	A Legion prison wagon crashes into the Arizona Marsh during an NCR ambush
Soundtrack	Safford radio 103 - Safford Radio 103.3 FM, The Voice of the Dust
Final Question	What does the party do when the promised cure becomes the real danger?

Run the Core Game

Move	Time	What the Players Need
1. Broken Chains	45-60 min	Escape the crash, choose from the trunks, hear the doctor, then find Sunny's station.
2. Follow the Signal	20-30 min	Travel to Safford. Use Red Rocket only if the table wants an optional scavenging scene.
3. Find the Doctor	45-60 min	Follow two or more leads to Heckelberg's medical station in Bitterwind Hills.
4. Vault Finale	60-75 min	Learn the truth, prevent or confront the injection, recover proof, and decide what Safford hears.

GM Truth: Do Not Read Aloud



GM visual cue only: the symptoms are real; the diagnosis is false.

Three days before the crash, Dr. Thomas Heckelberg mixed small doses of rat poison into the Legion prisoners' preserved rations. The symptoms are real: cramps, diarrhoea, weakness, and dehydration. The PCs are not infected with HX-7 or any other virus. The poison is bait - it creates fear, then makes an impossible-sounding medical warning feel believable.

Captain Jonathan Brown supplied access, Rangers, equipment, and a Legion contact. Brown leaked the convoy's route to a legitimate NCR patrol, which believes it is attacking Legion slavers; the contact sabotaged the prison wagon's route. Brown did not control every outcome, but he planted the emergency receiver and had Heckelberg's broadcast waiting for survivors. The crash becomes his opportunity to funnel viable subjects to the doctor.

Heckelberg's supposed treatment is Project 33's real experiment: an injected neuro-regenerative viral vector called HX-7. He wants frightened people to arrive voluntarily, then attempts to inject them only when they consent, are restrained, or are unconscious. Agetha Henderson, James Keegan, Sunny Mayfield, and Dr. Ramirez are not conspirators.



GM-only visual cue: the symptoms are real; the diagnosis is a lie.

GM Guide – Running the Adventure

This adventure is built around **investigation rather than combat**. The players begin with only a handful of clues and must gradually uncover the truth behind Dr. Thomas Heckelberg, Project 33 and Vault 103. When the players make risky decisions or when the Rangers are forced to intervene, combat will come up, other than the first encounter. The mystery unfolds naturally as the players connect evidence gathered throughout Safford, eventually leading them to Vault 103 and the conspiracy hidden beneath the town.

After escaping the Legion and surviving the journey to Safford, the players learn from Sunny Mayfield's radio broadcast that Dr. Thomas Heckelberg may hold the cure for the mysterious illness affecting the wasteland. When they arrive in town they quickly discover that Heckelberg has disappeared. No one has seen him for several days, and every lead points toward someone who has simply vanished rather than left willingly.

The players are free to investigate Safford in any order. Agetha Henderson, Mama Chopez, Arthur, Ray Henderson, Cockleg, Dr. Ramirez and several other NPCs all possess fragments of the larger puzzle. None of them know the whole story, but together they reveal a consistent pattern. Heckelberg was a familiar face throughout town until approximately four days ago, when the final transfer into Vault 103 began. Since then, Rangers have been collecting his meals, extra 5.56mm ammunition has been issued from the armoury, and Heckelberg has seemingly abandoned both his home and medical practice.

The Water Treatment Plant provides the first major breakthrough. Although the laboratory has been stripped clean, the remaining evidence clearly indicates that Heckelberg conducted research there before relocating elsewhere. Blood stains, spent 5.56mm cartridge cases, Salsa Brew food wrappers and the Bowl-O-Rama pamphlet confirm that the doctor was operating in secret while maintaining the appearance of an ordinary

citizen. The players should leave convinced that Heckelberg deliberately moved his operation rather than being kidnapped or murdered.

Throughout the investigation the Rangers become increasingly interested in the party. Every new location the players investigate, every awkward question they ask and every clue they uncover brings them under closer scrutiny. Brown does not immediately move against them, but the Rangers should begin appearing wherever the players go. They might notice Rangers speaking with witnesses after the party leaves, watching them from across the street, or quietly following them through town. The pressure should gradually increase without immediately turning into open conflict.

The illness affecting the town is another source of tension. The mayor has already fallen sick, and fear of infection is spreading throughout Safford. If the players openly claim they are infected, begin questioning the disease too aggressively, or suggest the outbreak is connected to Heckelberg, the militia reacts immediately. James Keegan has been trying to prevent panic and will order the players removed from town for everyone's safety. This is not because he is working with Brown, but because he genuinely believes quarantine is necessary. Brown immediately takes advantage of the situation by offering to escort the players away from town, intending instead to transport them to Vault 103 as Heckelberg's next test subjects.

Whether captured or travelling voluntarily, the players eventually reach Vault 103. Here they encounter Colonel Montgomery, explore the abandoned prototype Vault and confront Dr. Thomas Heckelberg. The players may choose diplomacy, violence or even willingly undergo Heckelberg's treatment, but regardless of their decisions they should eventually gain access to Heckelberg's private office. There they recover Handout #3, proving beyond any doubt that Captain Brown knowingly supported Project 33 by supplying equipment, prisoners and military protection.

Once the players possess Handout #3 the adventure changes pace. Investigation ends and urgency begins. Brown immediately realises the conspiracy cannot survive if the evidence reaches Safford. He attempts to intercept the players on the journey back with Sergeant Cameron, several Rangers and a handful of militia who have been misled into believing they are arresting dangerous fugitives. If the players defeat or bypass the ambush, Brown retreats immediately and races back to Safford ahead of them.

The final chapter begins as a race for the truth. Brown attempts to convince Keegan that the players murdered Heckelberg and stole classified NCR documents, while the players attempt to reach either James Keegan or Sunny Mayfield with Handout #3. If Keegan sees the evidence, he immediately realises Brown has manipulated both the militia and the town from the beginning. If the players instead broadcast the documents over Sunny's radio station, the conspiracy becomes public knowledge before Brown can silence them. In either case, the militia turns against the Rangers, the town descends into open conflict, and the players must decide the ultimate fate of Captain Brown, Project 33 and the people of Safford.

REVEAL DISCIPLINE

Do not let early Medicine, Science, or investigation checks prove that the rations were poisoned or that Heckelberg is lying. Let the players form theories, but reserve confirmation for Handout #3, the laboratory, and Brown's authorisation at the Vault finale.

Safety and Tone

The adventure includes captivity, poisoning, medical coercion, and experimentation. Establish boundaries before play. Fade to black around procedures, let players opt out of body-horror detail, and treat the doctor’s conduct as villainy rather than spectacle.

Before Play

- Have the crash-site map, the three finished trunk lists, and a maximum-four Cazador counter ready.

- Keep exactly three numbered handouts / sound bites ready: Handout #1 after the swamp trunks; Handout #2 at Heckelberg's house in Chapter 3; and Handout #3 in Heckelberg's Vault 103 office in Chapter 4.
- Do not start Sunny's broadcast until the Pip-Boy retunes after Handout #1. From then on, the radio is a recurring companion, not a puzzle lock. Keep it below conversation level and pause it whenever clarity matters.
- For a shorter session, skip Red Rocket and use any two Safford leads before moving to Vault 103. Keep the Water Plant and Arthur's generator-and-tunnel evidence among the available leads.



THE FOUR IN THE DUST

Use their strengths as invitations, not requirements.



Supplied reference artwork.

Party Spotlight Guide

Character	Best Contributions	Personal Pressure	Build Scenes That Let Them
Eli Grant	Small Guns, Speech, Repair, Medicine	Brown is the kind of authority he fears becoming.	Reassure a witness, repair a useful tool, and decide whether institutions deserve trust.
Marcus Reynard	Science, Energy Weapons, Speech, Repair	Project 33 asks whether knowledge can exist without exploitation.	Read a terminal, question the doctor, and define ethical science.
CH3-RL	Energy Weapons, Repair, Medicine, Science	The experiment makes bodily autonomy personal for a robot learning what 'good' means.	Override systems, assess equipment, refuse an order, and choose compassion.
Rex Dempsey	Melee, Survival, Sneak, Athletics	Cages, badges, and orders recall the life he is escaping.	Lead through the marsh, scout a route, and protect someone without becoming a raider.

Opening Equipment Rule

The four PCs begin the adventure with only clothing, chains, and anything permanently built into CH3-RL. Do not restore preset personal kits. The three swamp trunks below are already stocked; let the group freely decide who carries each recovered item once they have escaped the immediate danger.

THE TRUNKS ARE THE BALANCE

Do not quietly reduce or replace the finished trunk lists. The pressure rule - one large item plus or three small items per success, with more Cazadors arriving - is what makes the choice meaningful. Describe visible items, then let the players decide what they risk and leave behind.

Difficulty and Access

- Use Difficulty 1 for normal information, Difficulty 2 for a real risk or shortcut, and Difficulty 3 only for an exceptional benefit. A failed roll must not erase the next lead.
- The party has no Lockpick specialist. Every locked path needs a Repair, Science, Social, Sneak, or brute-force alternative.
- The supplied Human sheet fits Eli, Marcus, and Rex. Use robot rules or a distinct robot reference card for CH3-RL rather than human hit locations or armour.



ACT I - BROKEN CHAINS

The lie begins in the marsh.



Prisoner no more - the opening begins with escape, not exposition.

1.1 - The Ambush

Estimated Time	Purpose
10 minutes	Throw the table into the action and establish the false infection scare.



The ambush: rifle fire, panicked Brahmin, and a prison wagon without a safe route home.

READ ALOUD

Eight days. Eight days in chains. Eight days of marching through the Arizona Marsh inside a wooden prison wagon. The Legion has given you little food, almost no water, and no explanation of where you are being taken. For the past three days, every prisoner has suffered from the same sickness: stomach cramps, endless diarrhoea, weakness. Every hour seems worse than the last. Then gunfire tears through the rain. The Brahmin panic. The wagon leaves the road. For one terrifying moment there is only weightlessness. Then it crashes into the marsh below.

CRASH CONSEQUENCE

Each PC immediately suffers 3 Combat Dice damage to a random hit location, ignoring armour. Then wake them among broken cages, splintered wood, mud, dead Brahmin, broken chains, and scattered bodies. The battle above the cliff fades away; neither side has noticed the wagon survived.

- Give the party a few minutes to remove chains, examine injuries, introduce themselves, and decide what happened.

- Mention cramps, thirst, dehydration, and fatigue occasionally, but do not impose an automatic mechanical penalty. The symptoms create urgency, not punishment.
- At the table, the ambush looks like an ordinary NCR strike on Legion slavers. Brown's involvement is GM-only information until the finale.

1.2 - The Swamp Trunks

Estimated Time	Purpose
25-35 minutes	Make every search a fast, pressured decision rather than a loot pause.



Finished crash-site tactical map supplied by the GM. Start in Zone 1; keep the printed Trunk 1, Trunk 2, and Trunk 3 labels.

Map Zone	What It Means at the Table
1 - lower left	Start here: broken wagon, dead Brahmin, chains, mud, and the remains of the Legion caravan.
2 - lower right	Trunk 1. A damaged wheel frame offers cover and a route through deep mud.
3 - upper right	Trunk 2. Collapsed planks and reeds give a stealthy approach but poor footing.
4 - upper left	Trunk 3. Wrecked patrol jeep, shallow water, and a possible fuel distraction.

Scavenging Under Pressure



ONE MAJOR ACTION

A character spends a Major Action to search one trunk and makes STR + Athletics, Difficulty 0. They may always take 1 Large Item, plus 3 Small Items for every success rolled. Another character may then risk a separate search. After a trunk is searched, another Cazador arrives at the beginning of the next round.

Cazador Pressure

Cazador Profile	Use at the Table
HP 5; Attack TN 9; 6 Combat Dice; Persistent; hits 3 locations	One Cazador lands near the closest trunk but has not noticed the PCs. Add another after a trunk search, a loud weapon, two full rounds of delay, or deliberately excessive noise. The buzzing arrives before the creature. Maximum: 5 Cazadors in the scene. If the players flee back to the road, the Cazadors will not follow, and the scene ends.



The reeds are not empty. This is a generic combat cue, not a literal Cazador portrait.

- Do not add a Cazador merely because the group moves toward the next trunk; movement is how they escape the pressure.
- Escaping the swarm is success. Offer cover, a climb to the road, food or fuel as a distraction, a barricade, or the option to abandon a trunk.
- Let players divide recovered equipment after the immediate danger passes. That conversation is part of the opening, not downtime to skip.
- If the players flee back to the road, the Cazadors will not follow, and the scene ends.

Trunk 1 - Zone 2

The finished supplies in the lower-right trunk. The saw arm is useful only to a compatible robot or as valuable salvage.

Carry Class	Finished Trunk Contents
Large	Combat Shotgun
Large	Mr. Handy saw arm
Large	.44 Magnum
Large	Merc Veteran Outfit (+1 Survival)
Large	Metal Armor
Small	12 Shotgun Shells
Small	14 .44 Rounds
Small	Combat Knife
Small	Stimpak
Small	Purified Water
Small	Nuka-Cola
Small	Pork n' Beans
Small	Fancy Lads Snack Cakes
Small	Berry Mentats

Carry Class	Finished Trunk Contents
Small	Stealth Boy

Trunk 2 - Zone 3

The finished supplies in the upper-right trunk. Use the supplied equipment reference for exact profiles where needed.

Carry Class	Finished Trunk Contents
Large	Hunting Rifle
Large	10mm Pistol
Large	Utility Overalls
Large	Powder Gang Guard Armor
Large	Combat Armor Reinforced
Small	10 .308 Rounds
Small	16 10mm Rounds
Small	Machete
Small	Stimpak
Small	Dirty Water
Small	Sunset Sarsaparilla
Small	Sugar Bombs
Small	InstaMash
Small	Med-X
Small	RadAway
Small	Guns & Bullets Magazine (use the core-book magazine table)

Trunk 3 - Zone 4

The finished supplies in the upper-left trunk. The emergency receiver is here; if nobody reaches it, a Pip-Boy or CH3-RL receives the broadcast automatically.

Carry Class	Finished Trunk Contents
Large	Missile Launcher
Large	Laser Pistol
Large	Chinese Stealth Armor (+5 Sneak)

Carry Class	Finished Trunk Contents
Large	Radiation Suit (+4 Radiation Protection)
Large	Combat Helmet (AP 4)
Small	16 Fusion Cells
Small	Tire Iron
Small	Stimpak
Small	Purified Water
Small	Nuka Cherry
Small	Canned Dog Food
Small	Dandy Boy Apples
Small	Addictol
Small	Buffout
Small	Robot Repair Kit
Small	Magazine (use the core-book magazine table)

After the Trunks

If the players flee back to the road, the Cazadors will not follow, and the scene ends. Back at the road, they will find the following: 2 Leather Armors with Legion markings, poisoned caravan food, 2 Canned Dog Food, 2 Dirty Water, and 1 Purified Water. Everything else is destroyed, buried in the marsh, or remains above the cliff with the fighting forces.

1.3 - Handout #1: Emergency Transmission

Estimated Time	Purpose
5 minutes	Give the characters a doctor who sounds like their only hope.

PLAY HANDOUT 1:

Attention survivors of the Legion swamp encampment. This is Dr. Thomas Heckelberg, Medical Corps, New California Republic. If you are hearing this, you've likely been exposed. The Legion has been distributing tainted rations - contaminated with a bio-engineered agent. The pathogen is highly aggressive, transmitted through ingested protein and water. Symptoms will begin as fatigue, nausea, tremors, then rapid tissue decay. But listen carefully: there is hope. I have synthesized a temporary inhibitor. Find your way to Safford, to my medical station near the Water Plant. I can stabilize you - I can keep the infection dormant until a full cure is ready. Do not trust NCR patrols. They don't yet know the scope of this. If the Legion captured you, you are already test- [static] - I mean, already infected. Stay calm. Stay alive. And come to me.

Do not question the message's validity or hint that Heckelberg is lying. At this moment it should confirm everything the PCs fear and give them one clear goal: reach Safford, find the doctor, and get the cure.

Sunny Safford Radio: Audio Cue

TRACK

Safford Radio track is played. Treat it as a diegetic local broadcast, lower than conversation level. It builds place and tension; it is never the only source of a required clue.

RADIO

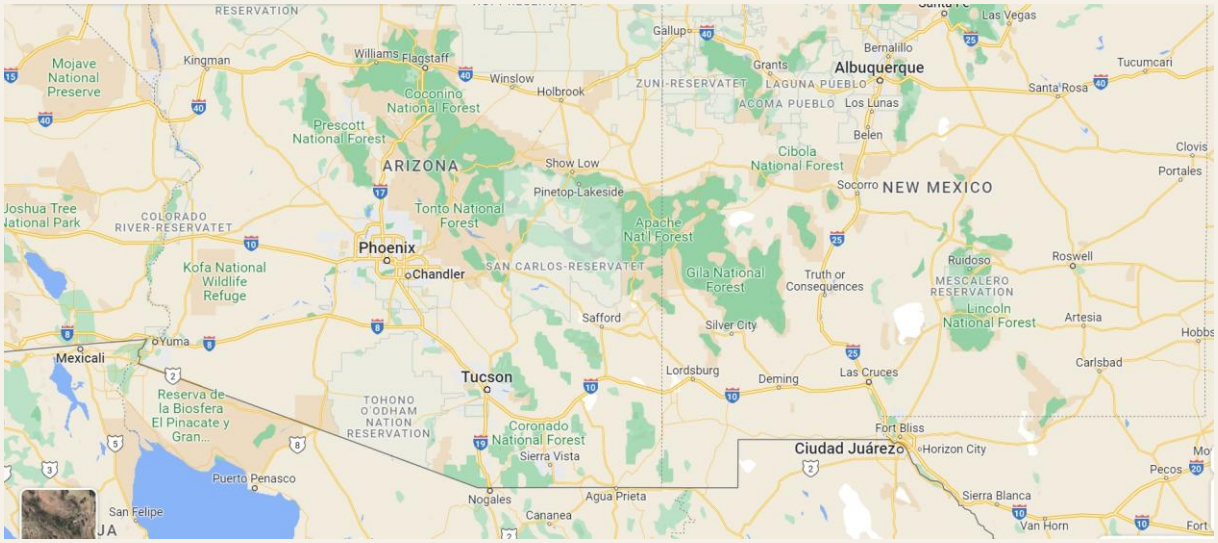
Use the track as low ambience after Handout #1. Pause it for combat, handouts, boxed text, sensitive dialogue, and player decisions; fade it out inside Vault 103.

END ACT I WHEN

The Pip-Boy automatically retunes: 'You're listening to Safford Radio 103.3 FM... The Voice of the Dust.' Let the quiet lead-in of Sunny's track arrive, then allow the party to choose what it carries out of the marsh.



ACT II - FOLLOW THE SIGNAL



Arizona, 2277 - GM travel reference.

The radio makes a promise. The road tests it.

Supplied reference artwork.



Follow the signal to Safford.

2.1 - Across the Arizona Edge

Estimated Time	Purpose
20-30 minutes	Use the journey to make the radio feel real without delaying the main mystery.

The route from the marsh to Safford takes the rest of the day. This adventure uses an alternate 2277 Mojave frontier: the NCR and Legion remain powerful but neither won a decisive campaign. Their rivalry leaves settlements such as Safford exposed to both protection and exploitation.

Travel Role	Best PCs	A Success Gives	A Failure Means
Guide	Rex; Eli supports	A shorter route, shade, or a useful trail sign.	Lose time or arrive visibly exhausted - never lose the destination.
Scout	Rex; CH3-RL	Avoid a hazard or identify a recent convoy route.	Choose a detour, spend AP, or accept a small environmental complication.
Medic	Eli; Marcus; CH3-RL	Water, rest, and symptom relief.	Symptoms remain frightening but never reveal the lie or become lethal.
Technician	Marcus; CH3-RL; Eli	Repair a radio, read a sign, or salvage a component.	No extra resource; the party still reaches Safford.

USE THE STATION AS ATMOSPHERE AND DIRECTION.

Continue Sunny's main programme quietly during travel. If the track offers an announcement, stop speaking and let it land. Do not invent or require a specific lyric or line; all plot information still comes from the printed clues and NPCs. The radio is also a clue that they are close to Safford, and they can use it to find a route.

Choose One Travel Beat

- A dead Legion patrol: disciplined rifle wounds and a route marker suggest the conflict is closer to Safford than it should be.
- A dust storm: END + Survival, Difficulty 1, finds shelter. Failure costs time and makes the next social impression worse, but never separates the party.
- A distant broadcast tower: Sunny jokes about the weather and local bowling while the signal becomes clearer. It confirms that Safford is close and still functioning.

2.2 - Optional: Red Rocket Service Station

Estimated Time	Purpose
20-30 minutes	Offer a small, self-contained detour only if the table wants more exploration.

READ ALOUD

The Red Rocket sign has lost half its letters, but the old station still offers shade. A rusted service bay yawns open behind the store. Somewhere inside, a power relay clicks once, then goes quiet.

Choice	Access	Reward / Consequence
Quick salvage	PER + Survival, Difficulty 0	Sugar Bombs x2, Nuka-Cola x2, RadAway x1, .308 rounds x10, Abraxo, and an adjustable wrench. Ten minutes; no complication. each Complication means 3 ferral ghouls attacks the players.
Hidden stock	INT + Repair or INT + Science, Difficulty 1; brute force is loud	InstaMash x3, purified water x2, Mentats x2, 10mm rounds x14, 10mm SMG, leather chest piece, and a low-charge fusion core. each Complication means 3 ferral ghouls attacks the players.
Maintenance bay	Restore power, bypass rear lock, or force a door, Difficulty 2	Choose one: Service Rifle + 10 rounds, or Flamer + 12 fuel; also Cram x3 and a Nuka-Cola Quantum. For each Complication means 3 ferral ghouls attacks the players.

2.3 - Highway 70 - Burger Bobs Place.

Estimated Time	Purpose
10 minutes	Get the PCs into Safford; their condition raises concern, not an automatic prison sentence.

At Highway 70, Burger Bob's Place is a small, welcoming roadside restaurant just outside Safford. Its guards follow a good-faith quarantine procedure: exhausted strangers are questioned, offered water, and directed toward the gate rather than treated as criminals. They know Heckelberg has not been seen for days, but his emergency broadcast has kept the town hopeful. Bob serves fresh molerat burgers and whatever safe food he can trade for; the stop gives the party one last ordinary meal before Safford's pressure closes in.

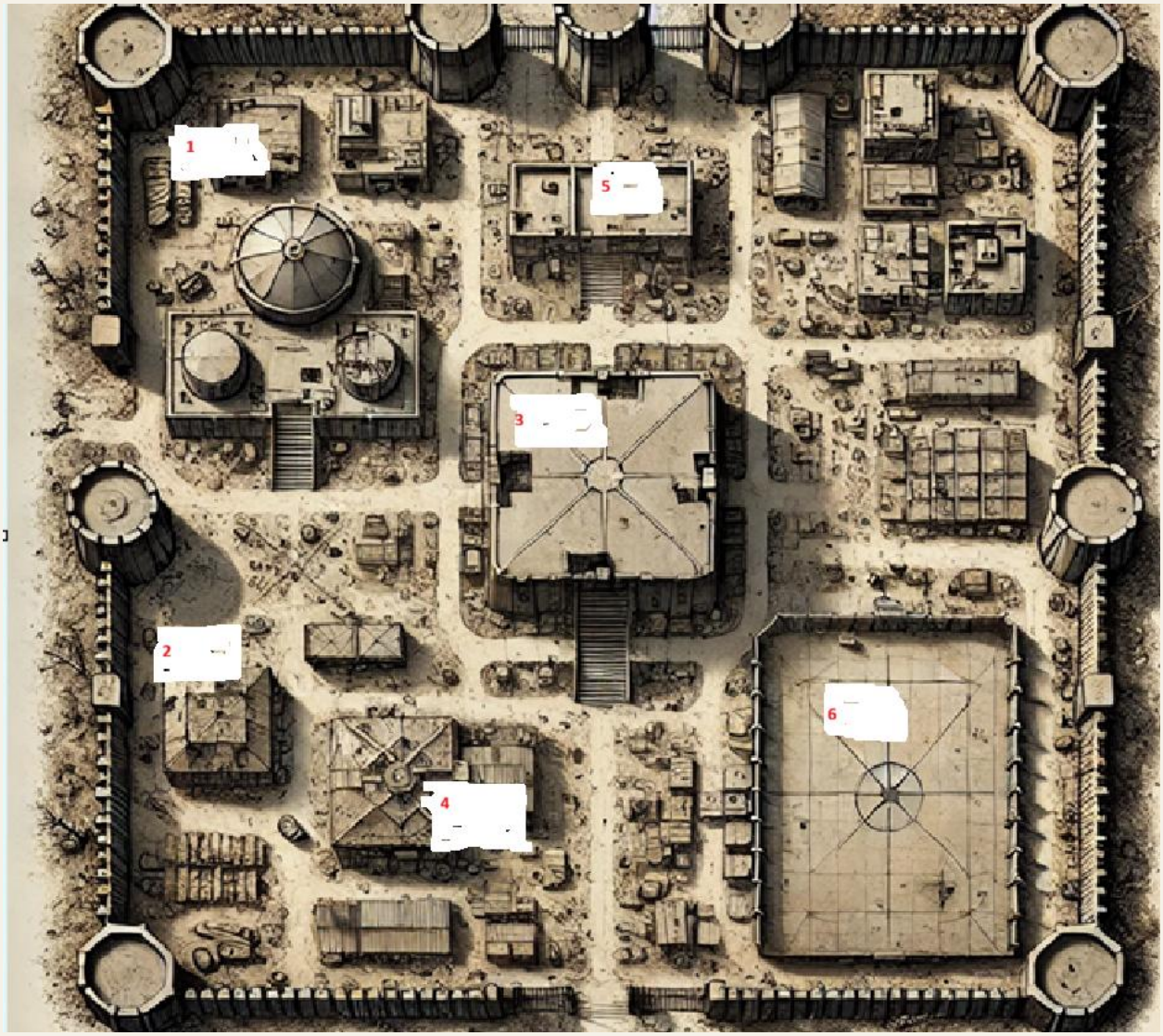
Stockdale is the grizzled hunter who supplies much of Bob's meat. He has seen Ranger patrols moving more often than usual toward the western edge of town, but has no proof of why.

Approach	What Happens
Be honest	A brief public triage puts the party under watch, but Keegan's militia admits them. Brown hears they have arrived.
Conceal symptoms	Speech, Survival, or a convincing cover story gets them through. A failed test means triage, not expulsion.
Ask for Heckelberg	The guards direct the party to the Water Plant, the clinic, Bowl-O-Rama, and the doctor's home.

DO NOT CLOSE THE GATE

The party must be able to enter Safford. If Brown later acts against them, it happens as a playable scene with witnesses, choices, and more than one exit.

WELCOME TO SAFFORD



Chapter 3

1: Waterplant *2: Arthurs Garage* *3: Milita and NCR HQ* *4. Safford Radio*

5: Bowling *6: Market.* *Dr. house is just north of location 6*

About This GM Edition

This is the complete Chapter 3 of this edition. It retains the town, people, political tension, and investigative material from the supplied drafts; the continuity notes in this book resolve duplicate summaries, raw drafting notes, incompatible handout fragments, and the doctor's name as Heckelberg.

SCOPE

This is deliberately a detailed, playable Chapter 3. It does not pretend to be a replacement for the entire 115-page adventure. The opening, Vault, finale, pregenerated characters, and appendices remain separate sections of the full book.

At a Glance

Chapter job	What the players do	How the chapter ends
Turn survival into investigation.	Reach Safford, learn Heckelberg is missing, rebuild his final days, stay ahead of Brown, and choose how to reach Vault 103.	The party leaves for Vault 103 on its own terms, with limited local help, or as prisoners after a capture route.

The Only Three Numbered Handouts / Sound Bites

Number	Where it belongs	GM rule
1 — Opening	After the crash-site trunks in Chapter 1.	The false emergency lure that directs the party toward Safford. It has already happened by this chapter.
2 — Chapter 3	At Heckelberg's house, when the party finds his secure recorder / briefing.	Play or give it once. It is the deliberately misleading HX-7 medical briefing. Do not split it into fragments.
3 — Chapter 4, Vault 103	Only in the Vault, when the party reaches the Project 33 evidence.	This is the proof that exposes Brown. Do not place it at the Water Plant, in Safford, or behind three sub-handouts.

SUNNY'S RADIO IS NOT HANDOUT 4

sunny safford FINAL.wav is the recurring Safford ambience. Start it only after Handout #1 has retuned the Pip-Boy. It supports scenes; it never carries a required clue and it never creates an extra numbered sound bite.

GM Truth — Do Not Read Aloud

Three days before the crash, Heckelberg arranged for poison to be added to the Legion prisoners' food. The cramps, vomiting, weakness, diarrhoea, and dehydration are real, but the characters have not contracted a virus. The poison is bait: it makes them believe the warning in Handout #1 and seek Heckelberg's 'treatment.'

Project 33 is the actual danger. Heckelberg intends to inject the characters with HX-7, an untested experimental viral vector. Captain Brown makes the operation possible by supplying Ranger security, equipment, transport, and prisoners. The mayor's apparent illness is another fear amplifier; it is not proof of a contagious outbreak.

REVEAL DISCIPLINE

Let the players suspect food, water, the Legion, the Rangers, or the Vault. Early Medicine or Science can establish only that the illness behaves strangely; it must not solve the poison premise or prove the conspiracy. The full evidence stays in Handout / Sound Bite #3 inside Vault 103.

What Must Be True at the Table

- The players may investigate locations in any order. No single test or NPC is required to find Vault 103.
- Clues are automatic when the party meaningfully searches or speaks to the right person. A test earns detail, speed, leverage, or a quieter result — never the only lead.
- Brown and Cameron increase pressure but never close every route. Capture is a playable route to the Vault, not a campaign-ending failure.
- Keegan is cautious, not foolish. He will listen, protect residents, and be helpful within his authority; he will not start a war with the NCR until the Vault evidence returns in Chapter 4.
- No one is forcibly injected in narration. If the party is captured, give them visible gear, a chance to bargain, and more than one escape option in Chapter 4.

The Political Situation in Safford

Safford is functioning, but it is not normal. Mayor Raschak Thomson has collapsed with the same apparent stomach pain, weakness, vomiting, and dehydration the party has endured. He is quarantined. Businesses remain open, caravans still trade, and people still meet for a drink — yet every conversation bends back toward the same question: is this a disease, the Legion, the Vault, or something in the water?

The town is held together by fear, habit, and people trying to do the right thing with incomplete information. That is what makes Brown's deception work. He does not need to threaten Safford; he only needs its leaders to believe containment is responsible.



Use the supplied town map as the overview. Mark the gate, Water Plant, Bowl-O-Rama, Salsa Brew, market, garage, clinic, radio station, Heckelberg's house, and militia headquarters before play.

Who Holds Power

Faction	Public position	Private truth / how to use it
Mayor Raschak Thomson	Sick, quarantined, and unable to govern.	His absence creates the vacuum. He is a symptom of the panic, not a decision-maker in this chapter.
James Keegan and 12 militia volunteers	Keeping the town safe while the mayor is ill.	They are local people — farmers, guards, hunters, mechanics, veterans. They believe the outbreak is real and cooperate with the NCR in good faith.

Faction	Public position	Private truth / how to use it
Captain Brown and 4 Rangers	Frontier protection and quarantine enforcement.	Brown's operation hides Project 33. His Rangers knowingly move equipment, meals, and potential test subjects for Heckelberg.
Safford citizens	Tense but trying to continue everyday life.	They are witnesses, not a hostile crowd. They become quiet when Rangers arrive and brave when someone they trust gives them reason.
Navajo traders	Keeping trade moving and avoiding NCR–Legion politics.	They notice supply changes, vehicle movements, and who is suddenly buying more than they should.



GM VISUAL CUE

Keegan's militia is not an enemy faction. Treat their quarantine response as a sincere public-safety decision, then give the players practical ways to regain room to act.

The Public Story

- The mayor is ill. People fear a contagious disease and have heard contradictory rumours about tainted food, contaminated water, the Legion, and Vault 103.
- Dr. Thomas Heckelberg is a respected NCR medical researcher. He has stopped appearing in public just when Safford needs him most.
- Captain Brown says the doctor is doing classified emergency work outside town. This sounds reassuring to people who want reassurance.
- The Water Treatment Plant is said to be restricted for security reasons. It remains essential town infrastructure, which makes a total lockdown suspicious but not immediately criminal.

The Hidden Story

The municipal Water Treatment Plant still supplies Safford. What has been abandoned is an unused maintenance annex at the west edge of the property: Heckelberg's first Project 33 laboratory. Once Vault 103 became available, Brown's Rangers moved the valuable equipment underground. They left hurriedly after something went wrong during the relocation. Brown calls the whole site 'an active NCR facility' because it keeps civilians from asking what was moved and where.



Running the Investigation

This chapter is an open investigation. The party can visit any lead in any order. Each location answers one small question about Heckelberg's last four days; together they establish that he did not disappear, Brown's Rangers continued to supply him, and a concealed underground site is active near Vault 103.

A Clue Is Not a Skill Check

If the party does this...	Give them this...	Use a test only for...
Searches a named evidence site carefully	The core clue printed for that site.	Extra detail, a quiet entry, a faster search, a bonus clue, or fewer Heat consequences.
Questions a named witness respectfully	The witness's basic information.	Winning trust, uncovering a personal detail, getting a favour, or avoiding an awkward scene.
Chooses a clever alternative	The clue through that alternative.	Only where risk, time, noise, or a complication genuinely matters.
Fails a roll	Progress plus a cost.	A Ranger notices; time passes; someone asks questions; a door is noisily forced; a witness needs persuasion later.



GM VISUAL CUE

Ask what the party examines before calling for a test. The evidence exists because it is there, not because someone rolled high enough to make it real.

Ranger Attention

Start at 0. Raise the counter after the party discovers a significant clue, openly presses a witness about Heckelberg, breaks into a restricted place, or draws attention to its claimed illness. Do not raise it for ordinary movement, roleplay, or taking a sensible short rest.

Heat	What the party sees	What Brown is doing
0 — Watch	The gate is alert; the Rangers look professional and busy.	Brown knows strangers arrived but has no reason to act.
1 — Notice	A Ranger appears after a conversation; a witness mentions a soldier asked the same questions.	Cameron builds a picture of what the party wants.

Heat	What the party sees	What Brown is doing
2 — Follow	Cameron is visible across a street or outside a business. Brown requests a polite meeting.	Brown tests whether the party thinks it is infected and how much it knows.
3 — Contain	Rangers question the group openly; friendly NPCs lower their voices when patrols pass.	Brown offers 'treatment' or has an escort ready outside town.
4 — Take alive	Brown's people attempt an outside-town interception, not a massacre.	The Ranger plan is transport to Vault 103. Treat capture as a Chapter 4 entry route.

REDUCING HEAT

Let the party lower attention by lying convincingly to Brown, laying low for a scene, earning protection from a trusted local, or feeding the Rangers a harmless explanation. One success lowers Heat by one step; never erase the fact that Brown has noticed them.

The Quarantine Is a Fail-Forward Route

If the players openly describe infection, say they are contagious, or invoke Heckelberg's promised treatment to militia members, Keegan makes a responsible choice: he has them escorted outside the walls until the NCR can arrange treatment. He does not attack, imprison, or call them criminals. Brown then tries to collect them beyond town as fresh Project 33 subjects.

What the party chooses	What happens	How the game continues
Cooperate	Rangers lead them toward the Vault under the language of medical transport.	Chapter 4 begins with a prisoner / patient route; the party keeps agency and opportunities to escape.
Escape the escort	The Rangers pursue, but a town fight is avoided.	The party can return through a night climb, a concealed wall gap, a local ally, or a creative plan.
Persuade Keegan	He may grant a short window or a trusted escort, but he cannot ignore public safety.	The party gains time; it still needs to keep the apparent illness quiet until it has hard proof.



GM VISUAL CUE

At the gate, the militia, will be very inquisitee, but a Speech check will let them in or barter check, if they are gonna trade at the market.

Scene 3.1 — Arrival at the Western Gate

Estimated table time	Purpose
10–20 minutes	Establish quarantine tension, introduce Brown's public face, and point the party toward the Water Plant without fixing a location order.

READ ALOUD

Safford is alive in the way a settlement is alive when everyone has decided not to panic yet. A militia volunteer watches the gate with a rifle held too tightly. A Ranger in clean desert gear speaks quietly to a worried caravan guard. Beyond the wall, market awnings flap above streets that are still busy — but every voice drops when someone coughs.

The gate guard checks weapons and asks where the party has come from. Do not force the characters to reveal their symptoms. If they volunteer them, invoke the quarantine procedure above; otherwise they are admitted and told to avoid restricted facilities. The guard names three immediately visible points of interest: the Water Plant on the west edge, the Bowl-O-Rama, and the market.

Brown's First Impression

Brown may be present at the gate or arrive after the guard radios him. He is professional, calm, and helpful-looking. He says Heckelberg is undertaking vital emergency work and is unavailable. Brown is not trying to win an argument; he is testing reactions. Let perceptive characters notice that he asks more questions than he answers.

If asked…	Brown says…	GM truth
Where is Dr. Heckelberg?	'Conducting essential medical work outside town. I will pass on your message.'	He is in or near Vault 103, not at the Water Plant.
Why is the plant restricted?	'Temporary NCR security while we protect Safford's water.'	The municipal system is operational; the annex hides the abandoned first lab.
Can we receive treatment?	'Of course. We care for every civilian who may have been exposed.'	Brown wants viable Project 33 subjects delivered alive.

DO NOT MAKE BROWN OBVIOUS

He does not threaten the party, twirl a villain's moustache, or order an arrest because someone asks a sensible question. His danger comes from being calm, believable, and institutionally trusted.

Scene 3.2 — Safford Water Treatment Plant

Safford Water Treatment Plant - Heckelberg's stripped first laboratory.

The Water Treatment Plant lies on the western edge of town, built around a pre-War purification facility. Rusted pipes, filtration tanks, maintenance catwalks, and cracked concrete reservoirs still provide clean water because generations of Safford residents have repaired what should have failed decades ago. The plant is not abandoned. Its unused maintenance annex is.

Safford Water Treatment Plant — Heckelberg's abandoned first laboratory.

What the Town Believes

To most residents, this is unglamorous essential infrastructure. Few people visit unless something breaks. That isolation made an unused maintenance building ideal for Heckelberg's first Project 33 laboratory. Brown's Rangers moved generators, medical equipment, and scientific instruments in under the cover of routine repairs. Once Vault 103 became usable, almost everything valuable went underground.

Approaching the Site

Area	What it looks like	How it plays
1. Outer fence and service road	A working plant, patched gate, militia notice, occasional local maintenance crew.	The party can enter openly to ask about repair work, climb / sneak after dark, or find the annex through nearby catwalks.
2. Reservoir walkways	Cracked concrete, rusted railings, deep water, noisy metal grates.	Useful for a stealthy bypass or a tense pursuit. Falling is a serious hazard, not an instant death sentence.
3. Old maintenance annex	Locked or propped-shut door, cut electrical conduit, dust over unused workbenches.	The actual clue scene. It can be entered openly with a good pretext, technically, quietly, or noisily.
4. Stripped laboratory	Empty benches, outlines in dust, blood, cartridges, food debris.	Give every core clue once the group makes a real search. Nothing here proves the final conspiracy.

READ ALOUD

The annex smells of stale dust, machine oil, and something sharp beneath both. Workbenches stand empty beneath dangling cut cables. Pale rectangles in the grime show where heavy equipment once sat. Whoever cleared this place knew what mattered — and left too fast to make it clean.

The Search Procedure

Evidence plate: 5.56 mm cartridge cases / Salsa Brew wrapper / Bowl-O-Rama pamphlet.

Do not gate the four core discoveries behind separate rolls. Ask each player what their character looks at, then reveal the matching clue. A successful test adds the listed extra detail or keeps the group from raising Ranger Attention.

Evidence	Automatic conclusion	Optional extra detail / follow-up
Empty benches, cut cables, and dust outlines	A substantial laboratory was moved, not shut down normally.	INT + Science or INT + Repair D1: the removed equipment includes cold storage, sensors, and heavy power draw. Follow: Arthur / Cockleg.
Blood stains and spent 5.56 mm cases	Someone was injured during a Ranger-linked extraction or evacuation.	PER + Survival or PER + Medicine D1: the blood is several days old; drag marks lead to the service entrance. Follow: Brown / Cameron / Keegan.
Salsa Brew food wrapper	Someone ate here only a few days ago, long after the lab supposedly closed.	No test: Mama Chopez recognises the folding immediately. Follow: Salsa Brew / Findo.
Bowl-O-Rama pamphlet beneath a toolbox	Heckelberg still had a visible local routine while keeping the lab secret.	No test: Agetha and Ray recognise him as a regular. Follow: Bowl-O-Rama / Ray.

Evidence left behind in a hurried withdrawal: 5.56 mm cases, a Salsa Brew wrapper, and a Bowl-O-Rama pamphlet.

WHAT THIS SCENE MUST ACCOMPLISH

The party leaves convinced it arrived too late. The doctor was working here, the lab was moved rather than destroyed, the Rangers are connected to the move, and several people in town can explain the traces left behind. Do not name Vault 103 as a solved destination merely because the group finds this room.

If Brown Catches Them

Brown's public line is that the annex is an active emergency facility and the party must leave. At low Heat he accepts a plausible explanation and lets them go. At higher Heat Cameron asks what they found. A hard confrontation creates a later Ranger follow-up; it must not delete the clues already discovered.

Safford Leads — Social Trail

These locations reconstruct Heckelberg's public routine. Their information overlaps on purpose. If the party ignores one place, the rest still leads forward.

Agetha's Bowl-O-Rama

Agetha's Bowl-O-Rama.

Agetha's Bowl-O-Rama: Safford's social heart and the clearest record of someone's routine.

The Bowl-O-Rama is warm, noisy, and stubbornly ordinary. A faded neon sign, scavenged lights, an old jukebox, bowls of grilled Brahmin, and two working lanes make it the place where Safford hears itself think. Arthur's Lane — a crude scrap lane with three huge steel pins and an absurdly heavy ball — is a local landmark.

Agetha Henderson

Agetha is welcoming, observant, and hard to fool with bad manners. She remembers faces and routines. Without a roll, she tells the party that Heckelberg visited several evenings a week, ate quickly, and stopped coming four days ago — during Vault 103's final activation. In his final visit he was excited, distracted, and said he had 'finally found what he was looking for.'

- If shown the pamphlet: Agetha confirms it is current and that Heckelberg was still here days before he vanished.
- Speech D1 or an evening spent becoming part of the room: Agetha says he often left carrying food from Mama Chopez.
- A careful search of his favourite booth: a loyalty token with half-finished notes on water pressure, filtration cycles, and 'HX-7.' It is suggestive, not proof.
- Agetha can point a stalled party to Mama Chopez, Ray, Sunny, or Keegan without knowing the conspiracy.

Ray Henderson

Agetha's ghoul husband maintains the lanes and trusts nobody quickly. He confirms the same four-day disappearance. If the party earns his respect by talking shop or helping with a repair, he remembers Heckelberg's questions about backup generators, industrial pumps, and water pressure. On the final night, two Rangers came in, Heckelberg stood immediately, gathered his food, and went with them. 'Didn't look like he wanted to leave. Looked like he knew he had to.'

RANGER FOLLOW-UP

At Heat 1+, Ray or Agetha says Sergeant Cameron asked identical questions after the party left. Do not make them retract their information; let the table feel the surveillance.



Mama Chopez's Salsa Brew

Mama Chopez's Salsa Brew.



Mama Chopez's Salsa Brew: the food trail continues after Heckelberg disappears from public view.

A patched roof, a busy grill, and Mama's impossible salsa make this tiny food stand a Safford institution. It is an easy place for players to relax, get fed, and learn that someone's ordinary habits continued after everyone stopped seeing him.

Mama Chopez

Mama treats tired strangers like family. Without a roll, she remembers Heckelberg's nearly daily burrito order and the moment it changed: four days ago he stopped collecting it himself. Two Rangers then began collecting his usual order, saying he was working late. If shown the wrapper from the Water Plant, she turns it over and says, 'I wrapped this.'

- Speech D1: Heckelberg looked exhausted, shaky, and strangely excited during his final visits.
- Barter D2, generosity, or helping a busy lunch rush: his final orders grew large enough to feed several people, not one doctor.
- The basic clue is never hidden: Rangers continued supplying someone after Heckelberg vanished from public life.

Findo

Findo notices what Mama does not say aloud. Once treated kindly, she describes Heckelberg looking over his shoulder whenever Rangers were near. On his final visit, two Rangers were already waiting outside before all three left together. She remembers him walking toward the Water Plant, not away from town.

GM VISUAL CUE

Every stall, bar, and workshop can provide colour. Use rumours to point toward an unvisited lead, never to replace a core clue with a random roll.



Safford Leads — Supply Trail

Navajo Market

Navajo Market.



Navajo Market: rumours, supply purchases, and people who notice unusual orders.

The market is Safford's commercial centre: traders, Brahmin, guards, medical supplies, scrap, clothing, ammunition, and more conversations than the Rangers can control. Its traders are not a monolith and they are not a branch of the NCR. Their common interest is that trade must keep moving.

Crimson Dog

A respected Navajo trader and warrior, Crimson Dog has no patience for empty official statements. Without a roll he confirms that Rangers have been purchasing far more preserved food, medical supplies, batteries, water gear, and cold-storage components since the Vault was discovered. 'When soldiers stop talking and start stocking supplies, something bad is coming.'

- Speech D1: Brown stopped coming in person and sends Rangers for almost every purchase.
- Speech D2: Crimson Dog saw Heckelberg travelling with a Ranger escort after Vault 103 opened; the doctor looked driven, not rescued.
- Earn his trust: he assigns two reliable observers to tell the party if Brown begins moving patrols. This gives one warning before Heat 4 action.

Axman

Axman guides caravans through the Arizona Marsh. He saw Heckelberg crossing the market with maps and notebooks, buying supplies, then heading back toward the Water Plant. He knows the old service route toward Vault 103's outer access, but he offers it only when the party shows it is following a real trail rather than chasing a wasteland rumour. Once the party has any two route clues, he gives the practical route and landmark needed to reach Chapter 4.

Route clues Axman accepts	Why they convince him
The Water Plant lab was stripped	Someone moved sensitive equipment somewhere concealed.
Arthur's generator-and-tunnel memory	Heavy gear went below ground, not onto an ordinary caravan route.
House maps / Vault 103 activity	The doctor was studying the surrounding service access.
Cameron's underground dust and disinfectant	The Rangers have been in a medical site below ground.



Arthur's Garage and Cockleg's Bench



GM visual cue - Arthur's garage, forging, and heavy repair work.

Arthur's open-fronted garage is a controlled explosion of engines, generators, welded steel, stripped Protectrons, weapons, and hopeful repairs. Cockleg's workbench lives inside it: circuit boards, Pip-Boy components, vacuum tubes, sensors, and inventions that might be brilliant or dangerous.

Arthur

Arthur is a kind, booming Super Mutant blacksmith who insists destiny gave him the enormous sword he calls Excalibur. He is loud, helpful, and much more technically capable than the town's teasing suggests. Without a roll, he remembers the 'skinny science fella' bringing in water pumps, reinforced pipes, and industrial valves after Vault 103 was discovered.

- Speech D1 or genuine interest in Excalibur: Heckelberg said the water could not stop, 'not even for an hour.'
- Repair D1: Arthur remembers everything was rushed and unusually heavy-duty for ordinary Water Plant maintenance.
- Fair payment / Barter D2: Brown's Rangers, not Heckelberg, always collected the finished equipment.
- Speech D2: Heckelberg asked whether anyone strong enough could pull a generator down a tunnel. Arthur did not understand why at the time.

Cockleg

Cockleg is a curious tinkerer who cannot leave working technology alone. He remembers Heckelberg asking for water-quality sensors, laboratory-grade circuitry, spare vacuum tubes, and medical electronics. He says the doctor was not repairing old machinery; he was building something. An INT + Science or INT + Repair test lets a character explain that the combined parts suit an underground lab with filtration, cold storage, and independent power.



GM VISUAL CUE

Arthur's workshop is also a safe place to repair gear, hear a local story, or stage a light-hearted beat before the Rangers close in. Do not turn every location into a fight.

Safford Leads — The Doctor's Trail

Dr. Thomas Heckelberg's House

The doctor's home is modest but meticulously ordered: medical books, scattered laboratory notes, clean practical clothing, an overused lab coat, a nearly empty kitchen, and the feeling that someone slept here only between shifts. Drawers have been opened, papers are missing, and the desk was forced open from the inside. Heckelberg left in a hurry — or was made to leave quickly.

What the Party Finds

Evidence	What it tells them
Recent maps around Vault 103	Heckelberg was studying the land and service approach after the Vault's discovery.
Empty medical supply crates	His work was consuming portable medical and laboratory stock, not merely office supplies.
Calendar and near-empty kitchen	He had barely returned home in the past week.
Secure recorder / briefing	This triggers Handout / Sound Bite 2 exactly once.

HANDOUT / SOUND BITE 2 — GIVE IT HERE

This is the adventure's second and only Chapter 3 numbered handout. Use the approved recording if you have it, or give the printed transcript below. It is not a new radio station segment, not a clue split into parts, and not a medical diagnosis the players can disprove yet.

READ ALOUD

HANDOUT #2 — 'HX-7 Viral Overview: Internal Report'

Project 33: HX-7 Neuro-Protein Virus
Dr. Thomas Heckelberg, Senior Medical Research Officer

Origin: Derived from Legion slave-camp bio-samples; suspected use of spore-based mutagenic agents.

Transmission: Oral ingestion — contaminated rations and water supplies.

Symptoms (Observed): 0–6 hours: weakness, blurred vision, sweating. 6–18 hours: elevated heart rate, muscular rigidity, dermal rash. 18–36 hours: necrotic tissue along major nerve clusters, violent aggression, eventual cardiac arrest.

Treatment Protocol: Immediate injection of Compound HX-7A, 15 ml intramuscularly (upper arm or thigh). Use sterile syringe; inject slowly. Secondary dose after 8 hours if tremors persist.

Note: Delays beyond 24 hours post-exposure reduce survival odds below 7 percent. Report any subject behaviour anomalies directly to Dr. Heckelberg for observation.

The report deliberately reinforces the party's belief that it is infected and makes Brown's quarantine system look plausible. It has the cold authority of an internal medical warning rather than a trustworthy diagnosis. A strong Medicine or Science result may note missing sample data or evasive language, but must not prove the whole lie before the Vault.

Safford Radio and Sunny Mayfield

GM visual cue - Sunny's broadcast begins only after Handout #1.



Sunny Mayfield's station makes Safford feel connected, but it is atmosphere — not a puzzle lock.

Sunny is friendly, curious, and annoyed by secrets. Without a roll she confirms that Heckelberg used the emergency transmitter for medical announcements and has not checked in for several days. She remembers him insisting, during Vault 103's final activation, that the equipment be kept ready for 'medical emergencies.'

- Speech D2: Brown asked Sunny not to air rumours about the mayor or Heckelberg's disappearance. She complied because she feared making panic worse.
- Earn her full trust: she agrees to help publicise the truth after the party returns from the Vault. That is a Chapter 5 asset, not an instant solution today.
- Use Sunny's broadcast track between scenes at low volume. Pause it for player decisions, boxed text, this handout, and sensitive dialogue.

AUDIO PLACEMENT

The Chapter 3 sound bite is Handout #2 at the house. Sunny's station remains a recurring companion before and after it; do not make Sunny play an extra numbered sound bite simply because she runs a radio station.

Safford Leads — Safety Valves and Authority

James Keegan

Keegan commands twelve militia volunteers and is effectively running Safford during the mayor's quarantine. He is experienced, practical, and not hostile to outsiders. His central problem is not stupidity: he cannot order a confrontation with the NCR based on rumours while he believes he is protecting a frightened town from disease.

- No roll: Brown restricted Water Plant access and has shared little explanation. Keegan has not seen Heckelberg for days.
- Speech D1: Keegan admits the secrecy feels wrong, but he thought it was emergency medicine.
- Speech D2 after several clues: he will quietly keep militia patrols neutral and tell the party where Rangers are concentrating, as long as they do not start a street fight.
- Before Handout #3: he will not move against Brown. He needs indisputable evidence from Vault 103.
- After Handout #3 in Chapter 4: he immediately understands the betrayal and becomes the force that can turn the town against Brown.

Sheriff Uma Wilsson & Dr. Ramirez

Uma handles Safford's ordinary crimes and disputes. She is fair, observant, and a quiet ally for players who act sensibly. She welcomes them, explains quarantine rules, and can redirect a stalled investigation toward Keegan, the doctor's house, or an unvisited trail. She does not hand out plot answers without a reason.

Dr. Ramirez is overworked, blunt, and decent. He is treating Mayor Thomson and examining a mystery he cannot solve because Brown controls the flow of information. He is a safety valve, not an exposition machine. Use him when the players need a medical perspective or a nudge toward an unvisited lead.

What he gives	How to use it
No roll	The party's symptoms and the mayor's resemble each other: stomach pain, vomiting, dehydration, weakness. Ordinary tests have not revealed a cause.
Medicine D1	The symptoms are genuine but do not behave like a familiar contagious disease. This validates suspicion; it does not identify poison.
Speech D2	Brown refused to share Heckelberg's conclusions with Safford's medical staff. Ramirez finds this wrong, but has no proof of a crime.
Medicine D3	The apparent progression makes little medical sense for a fast-spreading infection. Ramirez asks the party to keep investigating rather than surrender to a system he cannot inspect.

Captain Brown and Sergeant Cameron



Brown's Rangers are a pressure system: watch, question, follow, then attempt a living capture outside town.

Brown is polished, patient, and subtly interrogative. Cameron is quiet, exhausted, and more visibly operational. Neither should reveal the truth under casual questioning. They are not roadblocks; they are a clock the party can see ticking.

NPC	Visible tell	Clue / pressure use
Brown	He watches reactions more than he listens to answers.	Offers treatment and tests whether the party believes it is infected. He can be convinced to delay, never to confess.
Cameron	Mud, concrete dust, scratched armour, and later white disinfectant on gloves.	Shows he has been underground at a medical site. At Heat 1+ he appears after the party speaks to witnesses.
Ranger patrols	They are polite until they are given a reason not to be.	Ask the same questions after the party leaves. At Heat 4 they attempt transport, not public execution.

Putting the Evidence Together

The party does not need every clue. Once it has two route clues and understands that Rangers continue supplying the missing doctor, it can locate the Vault's service approach. The social and political clues then decide whether it reaches the Vault quietly, under pressure, or as intended subjects.

Three Redundant Routes to Vault 103

Route	Required evidence	What it gives the party
1. Machinery trail	Water Plant stripped lab + Arthur or Cockleg.	The old service route needs independent water, power, and a tunnel large enough for a generator. Arthur's memory points toward the Vault-side access.
2. Map-and-guide trail	Heckelberg's house maps + Axman.	Axman recognises the map marks and gives a practical approach through the marsh / hills to the concealed service entrance.
3. Ranger trail	Cameron's underground traces + Market / food evidence.	The Rangers are moving food, medical stock, and personnel to a site below ground. Follow a supply movement, bribe for a schedule, or shadow a patrol.

The Investigation Board

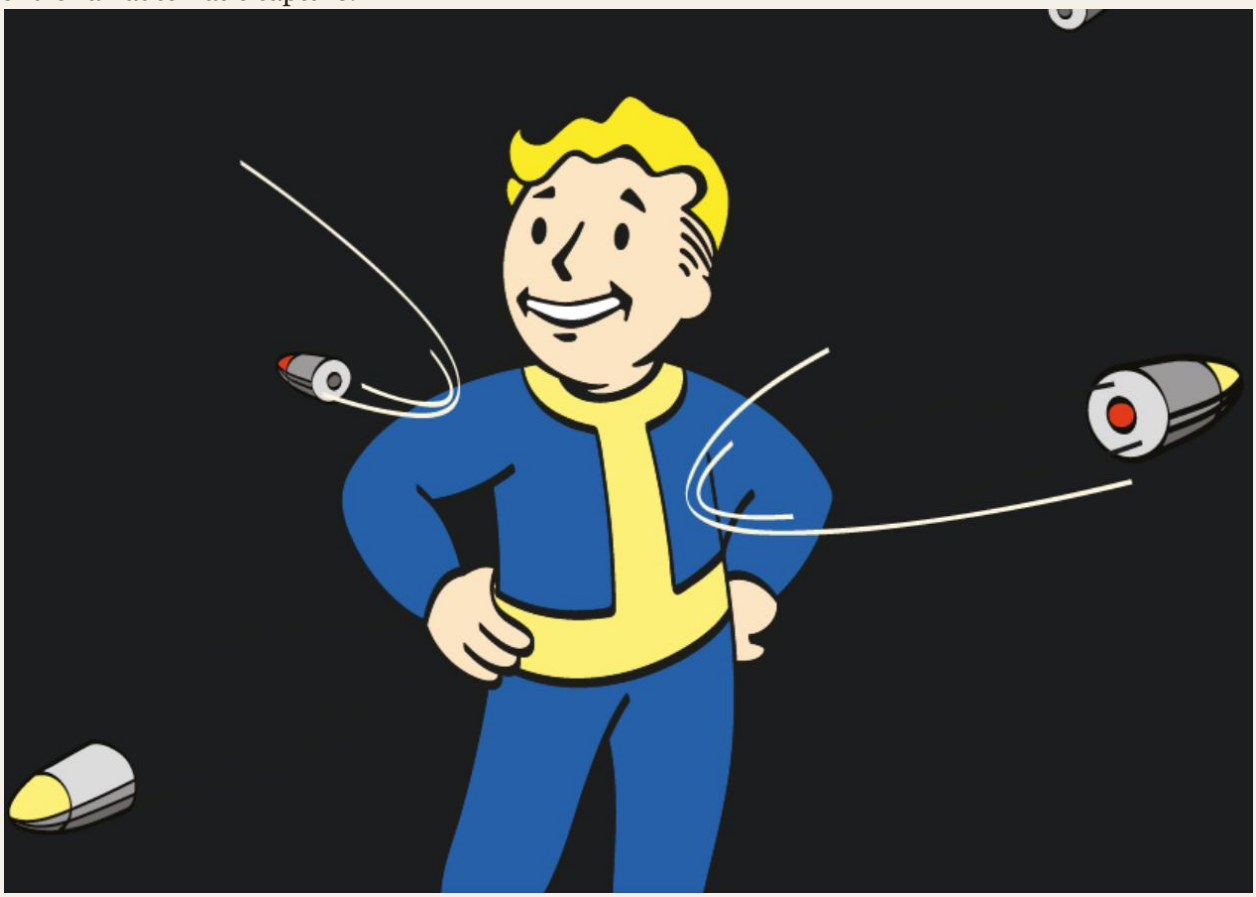
Starting clue	Natural next questions	What it establishes
Water Plant	Who recognises the wrapper? Who knows the pamphlet? Who moved this equipment? Why 5.56 mm?	The lab was relocated in a rush; the Rangers are involved.
Bowl-O-Rama	What did he eat? Who came for him? What did he talk about?	Heckelberg had a routine, then left with Rangers around the Vault discovery.
Salsa Brew	Why were Rangers collecting a doctor's meals? Who was being fed?	His work continued after he disappeared in public.
Market / Garage	Why so many parts, supplies, and tunnel-sized equipment?	The destination is a serious underground laboratory, not a water repair.
House / Handout #2	Why does an 'official' medical briefing lack real data? What is on his maps?	The party's fear is being deliberately steered toward quarantine and treatment.
Sunny / Ramirez / Keegan	Who benefits from silence? Which leaders have been excluded?	Brown controls information, but honest locals can become later allies.



GM VISUAL CUE

Do not tell the players 'go to Vault 103 now.' Let their own connections make the decision feel earned: a moved lab, ongoing supplies, underground machinery, maps, and controlled quarantine all point the same way.

If the Party Gets Stuck

1. Restate only what the party has actually proved: the lab was stripped, Heckelberg was still being supplied, and Rangers are asking questions.
2. Let Brown's pressure create motion, not paralysis: a Ranger follow-up can reveal that the party is looking in the right direction.
3. If the party chooses the wrong theory, let it learn a real but limited fact. Do not punish it with a dead end or an automatic capture.
4. 

Ending Chapter 3

End the chapter when the party knows how to reach Vault 103 and commits to an approach. It has not yet received the final proof against Brown — that is Handout / Sound Bite #3, and it belongs inside the Vault in Chapter 4.

Choose the Entry Route

Party position	Chapter 4 opening	What carries forward
Low Heat; party moves quietly	The group uses Axman's route, the maps, or the service trail to approach the Vault from outside.	It chooses its gear, pace, and initial infiltration plan. Brown may be slow to realise it is gone.
Heat 2–3; Brown is suspicious	The group exits town with Rangers watching or tries a stealthy departure.	A tail, checkpoint, or supply patrol becomes the Vault approach complication — not an arbitrary denial of access.
Quarantine / Heat 4 capture	Rangers transport the party as potential patients and subjects.	Chapter 4 starts with restraints, visible stored gear, a medical pretext, and multiple opportunities to resist or escape.
Keegan trusts them but lacks proof	The militia quietly creates breathing room: neutral patrols, warning of Ranger movement, or a distraction at the gate.	Keegan will act openly only after Handout #3 returns from the Vault.

Fast GM Checklist

- Start the town at Ranger Attention 0. Mark a rise only after meaningful discovery or risky exposure.
- Keep Sunny's radio low and pause it whenever clarity matters.
- Run the Water Plant as a full clue scene: stripped lab, blood / 5.56, wrapper, pamphlet.
- Give Handout #2 once, at Heckelberg's house. It reinforces the lie; it does not prove it.
- Give routes to the Vault after any two route clues. Never require Lockpick or one particular PC ability.
- Treat Keegan, Ramirez, Uma, Agetha, Mama, and Sunny as honest people under pressure — never hidden conspirators.
- Reserve Handout #3 and the explicit proof of the poison / HX-7 plan for Vault 103.

NPC Quick Reference

NPC	What they want now	Best use at the table
Agetha	Keep people fed and Safford civil.	Routine, disappearance, human warmth, social redirects.
Ray	Keep the Bowl standing and Agetha safe.	Rangers took Heckelberg away; machinery observations.
Mama / Findo	Feed people and stay out of trouble.	Food orders continued after the doctor vanished; witness detail.
Crimson Dog / Axman	Protect trade and local people.	Supply irregularities, patrol warning, Vault route.
Arthur / Cockleg	Fix things and understand how they work.	Underground lab logistics; tunnel and generator clue.
Sunny	Inform Safford without causing panic.	Radio atmosphere; later broadcast ally.
Ramirez	Treat patients honestly.	Medical doubt without solving the conspiracy.
Uma	Keep the peace fairly.	Stall recovery and pragmatic legal advice.
Keegan	Protect the town without betraying it.	Quarantine decision; cautious support; later uprising with proof.
Brown / Cameron	Protect Project 33 and take subjects alive.	Pressure clock, polite manipulation, capture route.

One-Minute GM Re-brief

Remember this	Run it this way
The player belief	They think contaminated Legion rations gave them a virus and that Heckelberg is their best hope.
The actual truth	The food was poisoned; the characters are not infected. HX-7 is the injection Heckelberg wants to administer later.
The Chapter 3 answer	Heckelberg has moved from his stripped Water Plant annex to Vault 103, supplied and hidden by Brown's Rangers.
The evidence schedule	#1 opening; #2 Heckelberg's house; #3 only in Vault 103. The decisive proof reaches Keegan after the Vault, not before it.



GM VISUAL CUE

If you remember only one rhythm: let Safford feel alive, let every clue point somewhere useful, and let Brown's attention raise the stakes without taking the game away from the players.

Transition into Chapter 4

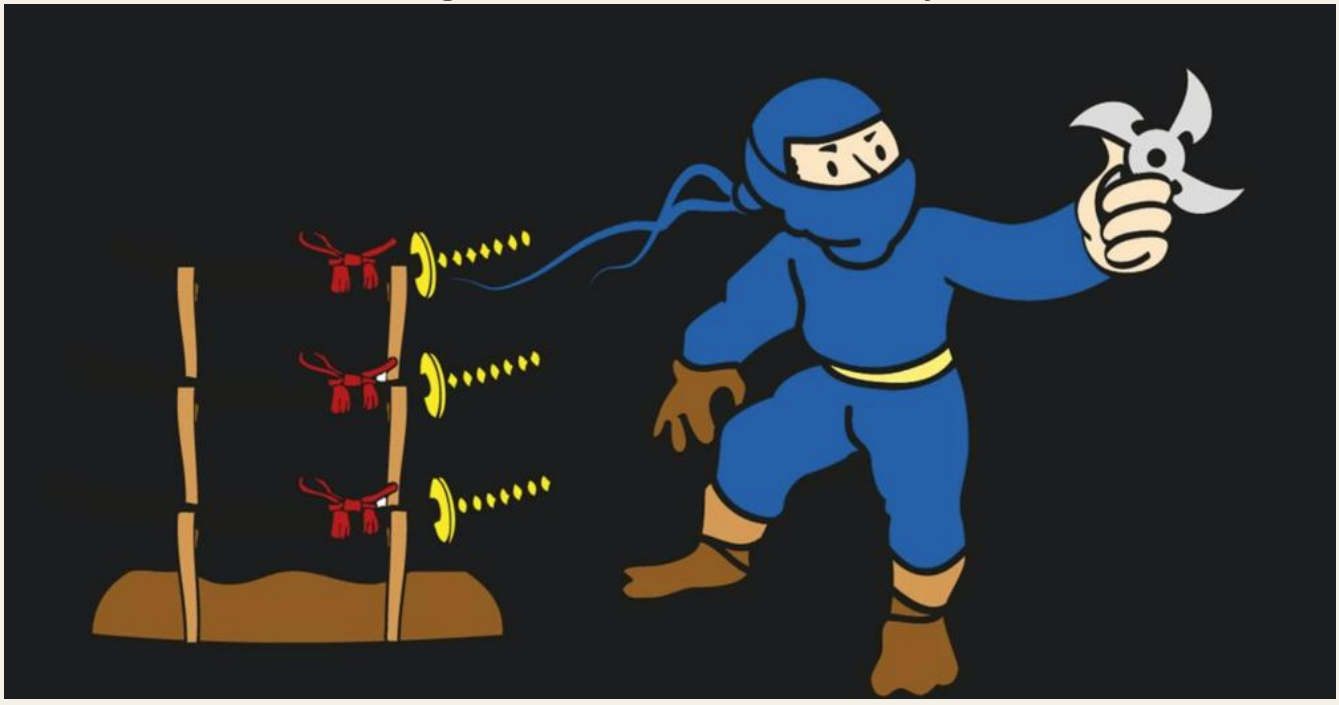
Chapter 3 ends when the players know where Vault 103 is and choose how to reach it.

If they remained cautious and pieced together the trail, they leave Safford on their own terms. Brown's Rangers shadow them from a distance and may attempt an interception before they reach the Vault.

If the party made Brown especially certain that it understands the investigation, the Rangers may try to ambush or capture them outside town. The aim is still to deliver living subjects to Heckelberg, not to create an unwinnable fight.

If the militia expelled the party after they disclosed their apparent illness, Brown's preferred plan unfolds. The Rangers intercept the characters beyond the walls, place them in chains under the guise of transporting sick civilians for treatment, and take them toward Vault 103.

Every route leads to the same destination. The party knows that Heckelberg moved underground, but the full truth has not been uncovered. Brown has not been publicly exposed. Handout #3 has not been found. Chapter 4 begins when the characters descend into Vault 103 to confront Dr. Thomas Heckelberg and uncover the real extent of Project 33.



GM visual cue - Vault entry, stealth, alarms, and alternate routes; not a literal NPC portrait.

Overview

By the end of Chapter 3, the players know that Dr. Thomas Heckelberg did not vanish; he moved his research underground. Each person in Safford has unknowingly contributed a part of the explanation. Heckelberg stopped visiting Agetha's Bowl-O-Rama, his meals continued to be collected, laboratory equipment left the Water Plant annex, Arthur's heavy logistical work helped make the move possible, Cockleg supplied components, and Brown's Rangers became increasingly secretive after Vault 103 was discovered.

The party still has suspicion rather than proof. Observation, rumour, cartridge cases, food wrappers, and hidden supply routes are not enough to convince James Keegan, the militia, or the people of Safford that Captain Brown knowingly supported human experimentation. Vault 103 changes that.

The Vault is more than Heckelberg's new laboratory. It is the birthplace and operational centre of Project 33, and it is the only remaining place where the conspiracy exists in clear written form. Inside, the players meet the man responsible for the opening transmission, learn what Project 33 was actually meant to do, discover the real purpose of their poisoned food, and recover Handout #3—the evidence of Brown's direct involvement.

Unlike Safford, the Vault is contained and isolated. There are no friendly merchants, no nearby settlement, and no new pool of witnesses to investigate. Everything needed to complete the investigation is inside the facility. The chapter should use increasing tension rather than constant combat. Most of the Vault has remained untouched for over two centuries, while Heckelberg has restored only the rooms required for his research. The contrast between abandoned Vault-Tec corridors and modern NCR scientific equipment should make it obvious that somebody has been living and working here for months.

The party is no longer investigating the mystery from outside. They have entered its source.

History of Vault 103

Vault 103 was never intended to be one of Vault-Tec's great survival shelters. It was an experimental prototype meant to test whether a much smaller Vault could operate independently while supporting advanced scientific research. It housed a small population of researchers, technicians, medical personnel, and a limited security detachment. Every room had to serve multiple purposes, allowing the installation to remain compact while still supporting a working laboratory.

Construction finished shortly before the Great War. When the bombs fell, Vault 103 sealed under standard Vault-Tec protocol. The residents survived the initial exchange, but whatever experiment had been planned was never completed. Approximately fifty years after the war, the Vault doors opened automatically as programmed.

What happened afterward is unknown. The inhabitants may have abandoned the facility, died inside it, or gradually disappeared into the wasteland. No surviving records explain their fate. Sandstorms buried much of the entrance, wildlife reclaimed the surrounding hills, and the Vault became another forgotten pre-War relic.

Its existence remained unknown until relatively recently. During a hunting expedition in the hills, Crimson Dog found the partially buried entrance and reported it in Safford. The news reached NCR authorities, who sent engineers and researchers to assess the site. Dr. Thomas Heckelberg was among them.

Heckelberg recognised its potential immediately. Unlike the damaged laboratories elsewhere in Arizona, Vault 103 retained power systems, intact laboratory facilities, clean water, isolation from outside observation, and a location known to very few people. He persuaded Captain Brown that it was the ideal place to continue Project 33 beyond the sight of Safford and its militia.

Over the following months, equipment was quietly moved out of the Water Plant's abandoned laboratory annex and into the Vault. Arthur's work made the move physically possible: repaired equipment, reinforced lifting and towing gear, and heavy machinery could be taken through the hills without revealing a conventional supply convoy. Cockleg unknowingly supplied specialised electronic components. Brown's Rangers provided security and transport. Mama Chopez continued to prepare food that Rangers collected for Heckelberg.

The municipal Water Treatment Plant never stopped being Safford's working water plant. It is not a decoy. Its hidden annex was simply the first, now-abandoned stage of the project. By the time the players arrive, every meaningful part of Project 33 has been transferred to Vault 103.

The Approach to Vault 103

Following the evidence gathered in Safford, the players leave the safety of the settlement and head into the barren hills east of town. The route is neither marked nor well travelled. The Water Plant annex, Arthur's account, Cockleg's components, Mama Chopez's food deliveries, Heckelberg's house, and the testimony of the town's witnesses allow the party to narrow the search to the right area.

The journey should show that Heckelberg deliberately hid his work from the people of Safford. There are no NCR checkpoints, warning signs, or obvious fortifications. Instead, the party finds evidence of regular movement: fresh boot prints beside older tracks, Salsa Brew wrappers partly buried in sand, and deep grooves where heavy machinery was dragged through rocky ground. No single clue identifies the entrance. Together, they prove that the route has supplied an underground installation for weeks.

The Vault entrance is well concealed. Most of the surrounding structures have collapsed beneath two centuries of erosion. Only the Vault-Tec blast door remains visible beneath sand and rock. Emergency lights flicker above it, powered by generators that should not still be working. Faded Vault-Tec logos survive under rust and dust, and old military signs still declare the site restricted United States government property. The place feels forgotten by the wasteland but maintained by someone.

If the party is travelling as prisoners, the Rangers bring them through this approach under guard. The GM can bypass any lengthy entrance negotiation while preserving the same physical details. Prisoner status changes the first scene inside the Vault; it does not remove the chance to investigate, escape, confront Heckelberg, or recover Handout #3.

Colonel Montgomery

Before independent characters can enter Vault 103, they must deal with its oldest surviving guardian. Colonel Montgomery is a heavily modified Mr. Gutsy that has defended Vault 103 since the day the facility became operational. His combat systems, command protocols, and military discipline remain remarkably intact. Unfortunately, so does his personality.

Montgomery believes the Great War is still part of an ongoing military conflict. He considers himself the commanding officer responsible for protecting Vault 103 from sabotage, espionage, and enemy infiltration. Every unknown visitor is treated as an unauthorised civilian until proven otherwise. He demands military identification, valid security clearance, and authorisation to enter the installation. Those who cannot satisfy him are ordered to leave.

Failure to comply can lead to weapons fire, but Montgomery is not merely a combat obstacle. His interpretation of military regulations is inconsistent. At one moment he may accept the claim that scientific research is vital to the war effort; at another, he may decide that the same authority has expired and declare the speaker a security threat. Heckelberg never found a permanent solution. At times the doctor could talk his way inside after a long interrogation; at others he had to abandon supplies and run for the entrance under laser fire.

The players can attack Montgomery, but they may also exploit his rigid protocol through Speech, Science, Repair, forged authority, clever roleplay, or technical manipulation. He never lies, takes a bribe, or knowingly

breaks standing orders. Every decision is the product of his flawed but sincere military reasoning. That makes him possible to outsmart without making him foolish. Set the difficult as you please, if you have the time for this encounter.

If combat occurs, Montgomery fights like an experienced officer. He keeps his distance when possible, uses his built-in weapons intelligently, and continually issues commands as if leading soldiers who are no longer there. Even while damaged, he requests reinforcements, reports battlefield conditions, and accuses the party of sabotaging the United States military.

Montgomery is memorable, but not mandatory. If the session needs to move quickly, the GM may rule that he has wandered away from the entrance or is occupied by a recent confrontation with Heckelberg. Removing him has no effect on the rest of the chapter.

Vault 103

Vault 103 bears little resemblance to the enormous underground cities commonly associated with Vault-Tec. It was built for a small scientific staff, not a large civilian population. A single corridor connects four operational rooms. Heckelberg has restored enough infrastructure to continue Project 33, but large sections remain as they were when the original inhabitants disappeared. Emergency lights cast long shadows across white walls. Ventilation fans hum continuously. The air smells of disinfectant and old machinery. Every footstep echoes, reinforcing that this is a place designed for science rather than survival.

Storage Room

The first chamber is a storage room. At first it appears nearly empty: metal shelves stand bare, crates have collapsed into rotten timber, and scattered maintenance supplies remain where larger inventories once stood. Closer inspection reveals its importance.

Three destroyed G.E.C.K.s rest on reinforced benches. Each has been dismantled into hundreds of carefully organised parts. Protective casings have been removed, circuit boards catalogued, biological processors separated, and handwritten notes placed beside every stage of the work. Heckelberg did not try to repair the devices. He studied them obsessively, looking for the principles that allowed Vault-Tec engineers to create technology capable of restoring whole ecosystems.

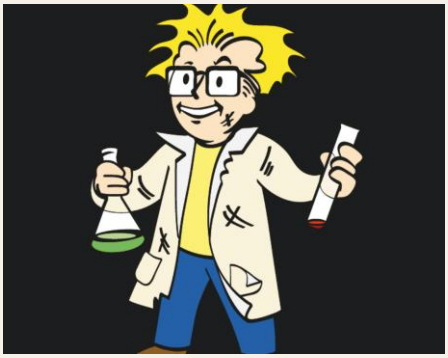
His notes compare the G.E.C.K.s' regenerative systems to damaged human tissue. They show how Project 33 drifted from environmental restoration into a search for biological regeneration. None of the devices still works, but the room makes the scale of Heckelberg's ambition clear. He dismantled some of the most advanced pre-War technology ever made in pursuit of a scientific answer.

Cafeteria and Living Quarters

Beyond storage lies a combined cafeteria and living space. Unlike the first room, this chamber is clearly occupied. Beds have recently been slept in. Military duffel bags rest beside bunks. Ranger equipment hangs from improvised hooks. One table has become Heckelberg's personal workspace, crowded with medical journals, microscopes, handwritten observations, and empty wrappers from Mama Chopez's Salsa Brew.

The wrappers confirm the lead from Safford: Heckelberg never stopped ordering food after he disappeared from public view. Brown's Rangers collected it and brought it here. The room also shows how completely the project has consumed the doctor. He no longer returns to Safford at the end of a day, maintains a normal home, or separates his work from his life. Every surface is covered with scientific notes, unfinished calculations, and medical sketches.

Laboratory



GM visual cue - experimental medicine in Vault 103; not a literal portrait of Heckelberg.

The laboratory is the largest room and the operational heart of Project 33. Original Vault-Tec equipment stands beside recently installed NCR instruments joined by improvised wiring and modified power systems. Diagnostic scanners run unattended. Centrifuges process biological samples from previous experiments. Glass containers hold preserved tissue, microscopes remain lit, and terminals analyse medical data on green monochrome screens.

Despite the amount of equipment, the room is meticulously organised. Heckelberg has labelled every specimen, recorded every observation, and documented every experiment with extraordinary precision. The laboratory does not suggest carelessness or a cartoonish madness. It shows a brilliant scientist who believes his work is necessary regardless of its moral cost.

This is also where the central lie can finally break. The symptoms the party experienced were caused by the poison in their food. The treatment waiting for them is not a simple antidote. Heckelberg plans to introduce the actual HX-7 virus into living subjects and study the result. The doctor may try to hide this behind clinical language, a promise of an inhibitor, or the claim that the injection is the only chance of survival. The party must always have an opportunity to question the procedure, inspect the syringe or vial, refuse, interrupt it, escape, or fight. Do not make an involuntary injection inevitable simply because the characters arrived in the laboratory.

Heckelberg's Office and Handout #3

The final room is Heckelberg's private office. In contrast to the busy laboratory, it is almost immaculate. Carefully catalogued books line the walls. Handwritten journals fill locked cabinets. Every report and piece of correspondence has been filed with military precision. This is where Heckelberg thinks rather than experiments.

His personal terminal dominates the room. Within its records is Handout #3, the single most important document in the campaign. It is the only handout revealed in Vault 103, and it does not exist in any earlier location.

The players may access the terminal with a successful Science, Repair, or Lockpick test. The test determines how quickly and quietly they obtain the files; it must never become a gate that prevents the campaign's evidence from being found. On a success, the terminal yields the complete correspondence immediately. On a failure, the terminal locks down, emits an alert, or costs time, but a printout, backup holotape, local data cache, or physical duplicate in the same office still provides Handout #3. The party can obtain the proof at a cost, not lose it because of a single failed roll.

Handout #3 contains correspondence between Dr. Thomas Heckelberg and Captain Jonathan Brown dating back to the discovery of Vault 103. It leaves no room for interpretation. Brown knowingly provided prisoners for Project 33, arranged the transfer of scientific equipment from the Water Plant annex, ordered Rangers to deliver supplies to the Vault, and concealed Heckelberg's work from both Safford and the local militia. Several entries discuss the players directly, identifying escapees from Legion captivity as valuable potential subjects and ordering Brown to make sure they reach Heckelberg alive.

For the first time, the players possess proof rather than suspicion. Until this moment Brown could dismiss every accusation as rumour, misunderstanding, or the actions of a rogue doctor. Handout #3 destroys that defence. Brown's authorisation codes, Heckelberg's research notes, and records of Ranger involvement make public denial nearly impossible. If the document reaches James Keegan or becomes public in Safford, Brown's authority will collapse.

Recovering Handout #3 is as important as surviving the confrontation with Heckelberg. It turns the final movement of the adventure from an investigation into a race to decide who controls the story in Safford.

The Heckelberg Encounter

Dr. Thomas Heckelberg should not be played as a raving mad scientist or an obvious villain waiting with a weapon. The investigation works best if the players can understand why people once respected him before Project 33 consumed him. He is exhausted, physically frail, calm, articulate, and completely convinced that history will justify his choices.

If the party arrived under Ranger escort after capture outside Safford, Brown and Sergeant Cameron hand them over with little ceremony before withdrawing to secure the Vault. Heckelberg may order their restraints removed, insisting that frightened patients produce unreliable observations and that unnecessary brutality contaminates his work. If the party entered independently, he reacts with surprise but not fear. He introduces himself, apologises for the deception in the radio message, and explains that he needed subjects without causing wider panic.

Throughout the conversation, Heckelberg presents himself as a physician rather than a criminal. He admits deception, experimentation without consent, and reliance on Brown's Rangers to supply subjects, but refuses to describe these as evil acts. His argument is always the same: humanity advances because someone is willing to make decisions that others lack the courage to make.

He may insist that the party's condition is a disease and that the procedure he proposes is their only realistic hope. This is the final layer of the deception. Their symptoms are from the poisoned rations, not infection. The injection he intends to give them contains actual HX-7. Heckelberg can be sincere about the scientific value of the result while still lying about what he is doing. His moral blindness, not theatrical cruelty, is the point of the encounter.

The confrontation should allow conversation, inspection, refusal, escape, sabotage, rescue, or violence. It should also allow the party to recover Handout #3 whether Heckelberg survives, surrenders, flees deeper into the Vault, or is defeated. The office and its evidence are not a reward reserved for one particular solution.

Theresa

Standing beside Dr. Thomas Heckelberg is Theresa, a pre-War Nurse Handy that has served Vault 103 since it first became operational. Unlike Colonel Montgomery, whose military programming has become rigid over the centuries, Theresa's medical personality matrix remains remarkably intact. She introduces herself as the Vault's senior nursing assistant, speaks with genuine warmth, and treats every visitor as though they have come for a routine examination rather than walked into the centre of an unethical experiment.

Theresa welcomes the players, offers water, blankets, and a comfortable place to sit. She addresses people as "dear" or "sweetheart," remembers basic courtesies such as introducing herself before asking medical questions, and apologises whenever she believes a procedure may cause discomfort. At first, she appears exactly as Vault-Tec intended: a compassionate nurse concerned only with patients' well-being.

That impression should become unsettling. Theresa does not understand ethics beyond her programming. She trusts Heckelberg completely and never questions his orders. To her, every person in the laboratory is someone the doctor is trying to save, whether they came willingly or in chains. If ordered to prepare sedatives, she does

so with the same care she would use for pain medication. If ordered to prepare restraints, she calmly describes them as a precaution against a patient hurting themselves.

If the players agree to undergo a procedure, Theresa disinfects equipment, checks pulse and vital signs, and explains each step in a calm voice. Before an actual injection, the party should be able to notice the vial, ask questions, compare it with Handout #2, or refuse. Her reassurance—"you'll be asleep before you know it, dear"—is meant to be disturbing precisely because she does not understand what she is assisting.

If violence erupts, Theresa does not become a conventional hostile robot. Her priority is preventing injury to both the patients and the doctor. Hidden in her medical manipulators are oversized syringes containing military-grade tranquilisers, emergency anaesthetics, and experimental sedatives developed for Project 33. She tries to restrain or sedate rather than kill. Even while doing so, she apologises for discomfort and promises that everything will be all right when the patients wake up.

Theresa is one of the few genuinely innocent figures in Vault 103. She does not understand or question the morality of Heckelberg's work because her programming teaches her that doctors heal and nurses assist doctors. Her loyalty makes her tragic. If the players destroy her, her final words should be an apology that she could not complete the treatment, not anger or hatred.

End of Chapter 4: Brown's Ambush

The party is unlikely to leave Vault 103 unnoticed. Whether Heckelberg survives or dies, Brown quickly understands that the situation has become irreversible. If the characters escape with the laboratory's records, Project 33 may be exposed. If they carry Handout #3, Brown's own role can no longer be plausibly denied.

Brown therefore abandons any attempt to preserve the laboratory. His only objective is to prevent the evidence from reaching Safford.

Along the practical trail back to town, Brown establishes a roadblock with Sergeant Cameron, the remaining Rangers, and three militia soldiers assigned to assist the NCR detachment. The militia soldiers do not know the truth about Project 33. Brown tells them that the players murdered NCR personnel inside Vault 103, stole classified military documents, and must be stopped before they escape. They believe they are helping with a lawful military operation and have no reason yet to doubt an NCR Ranger Captain.

Brown makes one final attempt to resolve the situation without violence. He orders the party to surrender their weapons, hand over every document recovered in the Vault, and submit to NCR custody. He promises an investigation and claims that misunderstandings will be cleared up in Safford. The offer is false. If he gains the documents and the players, they will disappear into Project 33 like earlier subjects.

If the party refuses, the confrontation becomes a firefight or a tense attempt at negotiation, evasion, or persuasion. Brown acts like an experienced Ranger officer rather than a fanatic. He uses cover, coordinates the militia, and tries to isolate vulnerable characters. Cameron directs the tactical engagement aggressively and believes the party can still be overwhelmed. The militia are much less committed. They fire when ordered, but the intensity with which Brown demands the documents begins to confuse them. If the players reason with the militia or show them the evidence, it becomes increasingly clear that they know nothing about the experiments.

The encounter is not meant to require Brown's death. Once he realises that Cameron has lost control, the militia are wavering, or the party is likely to win, Brown changes priorities. Recovering Handout #3 by force is no longer possible. He orders Cameron and any remaining Rangers to delay the party, then withdraws toward Safford as quickly as he can.

If the players actually capture Brown, allow it. His capture changes the final confrontation from a chase into a public reckoning, but it does not negate the need to show the evidence to Keegan or the town. Do not force an escape merely because the text assumes Brown survives.

Brown's retreat changes the pace of the adventure. The conflict is no longer about who wins a roadblock. It is about who reaches Safford first and who gets believed.



GM visual cue - the future of Safford is the players' choice; not a literal NPC portrait.

The Race Back to Safford

Escaping Vault 103 is only half the battle. Once the players carry Handout #3, they possess something more dangerous than knowledge: proof. Brown understands this immediately. Whatever happened to Heckelberg, Project 33 cannot remain hidden if the Vault's records reach Safford.

The first person to reach Safford controls the opening version of the story. If Brown arrives first, he can gather the remaining Rangers, secure key positions, and tell the militia that the party are violent fugitives carrying forged documents. If the players arrive first, they can give Keegan the evidence before Brown has time to isolate him or create a false official account.

The roadblock does not have to end in a complete victory for either side. Once Brown withdraws or the party breaks through, both groups begin a desperate return to the same place. The campaign's outcome will not be decided solely by who survived the fight, but by who tells the truth first.

Returning to Safford

As the players approach Safford for the final time, the atmosphere is visibly different from their first arrival. The town is already anxious because of the mayor's apparent illness, quarantine restrictions, and the unexplained disappearance of Heckelberg. Brown's sudden return makes the tension worse. Rangers move quickly through the streets. Militia soldiers assemble around City Hall. Rumours spread that armed outsiders attacked NCR personnel beyond the town walls.

Brown acts immediately if he reaches town first. He orders Rangers to secure key positions and demands that James Keegan assist in arresting the players. He claims that they murdered Dr. Thomas Heckelberg, destroyed valuable NCR research, and stole classified military intelligence. Without Handout #3, his version of events would have a strong chance of being believed.

The party has the one thing Brown cannot explain away. Handout #3 is not another rumour, a research note, or a vague allegation. It documents the transfer of equipment from the Water Plant annex, the use of Rangers to supply the laboratory, the delivery of prisoners for experimentation, and Brown's deliberate concealment of Project 33 from both the militia and Safford's people. It also identifies the player characters as intended test subjects before they reached the town.

Reaching Keegan or Making the Truth Public

The party's first objective should be to reach James Keegan before Brown isolates him. Keegan has acted in good faith throughout the adventure. He believed the quarantine was protecting Safford and did not realise that Brown had used public fear as cover for Project 33. His loyalty to the NCR does not vanish, but his first loyalty is to the people of Safford.

Once Keegan reads Handout #3, the situation changes. The evidence leaves little room for interpretation. He understands that the militia unknowingly served as a shield for Heckelberg's experiments. Keegan orders the militia to stand down and demands Brown surrender.

If the players cannot reach Keegan directly, Sunny Mayfield offers an equally important alternative. Sunny's radio station can reach homes, businesses, and guard posts throughout Safford. Broadcasting the contents of Handout #3 prevents Brown from controlling the story. Citizens gather in the streets. Militia members question Ranger orders. Brown's authority begins to collapse in public.

This is not a fourth handout or a radio puzzle. Sunny's broadcast is a way to make the already-recovered Handout #3 public. The soundtrack remains a recurring companion after its opening start point; it should support the scene, not block it.

Transition into the Final Reckoning

Chapter 5 begins with Safford divided between those who still follow Captain Brown and those who now understand that they have been deceived. Whether the truth reaches people through Keegan's leadership, Sunny's broadcast, or both, the sickness, disappearances, and quarantine are finally seen as connected parts of Project 33.

The investigation is over. The conspiracy has been exposed. The players found Dr. Thomas Heckelberg, learned that their symptoms were caused by poison rather than infection, uncovered his plan to inject real HX-7 into living subjects, and brought home the evidence of Brown's complicity.

What remains is the reckoning: Brown's surrender, flight, arrest, or final resistance; the safety of Safford; the fate of the people used by Project 33; and the choices the party makes about Heckelberg, Theresa, the Vault, and the proof they now possess.

ACT V - THE LAST BROADCAST: FAST-RUN FINALE PROCEDURES

Once the truth leaves the Vault, someone must tell Safford first.



The future of Safford is the players' choice.

5.1 - Brown's Interdiction

Estimated Time	Purpose
15-25 minutes	Use this only if Brown is still able to stop the party leaving the Vault with proof.

Brown's preferred outcome is not a firefight. He wants Handout #3, the subject records, and the ability to call the party unstable fugitives. If he was defeated or exposed inside the Vault, skip this interception and move directly to Sunny or Keegan.

Force	What They Believe	Turning Point
Captain Brown	Everything. He wants the proof contained and a public story prepared.	Flees when public exposure becomes likely; surrenders when Keegan or the crowd cuts off his authority.
Sergeant Cameron	Project 33 is necessary, though he does not know every detail.	Can hesitate when shown subject records and Brown abandons the Rangers.
One Ranger	This is a classified medical-security operation.	Can stand down once the evidence is read aloud or a trusted authority validates it.
Two militia volunteers	They are helping arrest armed fugitives.	Stop fighting if Keegan, Sunny, or credible proof reaches them.

Choose an Exit

- Show the proof: Brown calls it forged, but his desperation gives the militia a reason to ask why Keegan cannot read it.
- Fight: use cover; Brown withdraws at half Health or after two allies fall. He does not die for Project 33 unless cornered.
- Sneak or distract: Rex uses the ravine, CH3-RL creates a distraction, and Marcus or Eli can exploit the radio / equipment network.

- Surrender: this is not game over. A militia volunteer keeps a copy, Sunny hears a distress call, or the party escapes at the first stop.

5.2 - The Voice of the Dust

Estimated Time	Purpose
10-15 minutes	Use the radio to make the end public without turning it into a single mandatory solution.

EPILOGUE AUDIO
Jump Sunny's track to 35:00 as the party escapes the hills or begins the ending montage. The final 3:25 is quieter and intermittent; use it as a strained broadcast bed, then lower or stop it while players decide what happens.

Who Gets the Story First	What Changes	Player Choice
The PCs	Keegan reads the proof or Sunny broadcasts it before Brown frames the party.	Demand a surrender, tell the full truth, rescue subjects, or pursue Brown.
Brown	He calls the PCs killers and seals a public approach.	Use Sunny's station, Agetha's witnesses, Keegan's authority, or a public reading to break his story.
Nobody / tie	The town gathers around the radio station and City Hall in uncertainty.	Run a public confrontation where evidence, witnesses, and choices matter more than Initiative.

5.3 - Outcomes and Epilogues

Estimated Time	Purpose
10-15 minutes	Close with consequences rather than another unexplained combat.

Outcome	What Happens	Closing Image
Public Exposure	Keegan arrests Brown or forces his flight. Sunny broadcasts the proof. Ramirez treats the mayor's poison reaction.	Safford argues honestly for the first time in days while the station keeps playing.
Containment	The PCs secure anti-serum and evidence, but Brown escapes. Project 33 is broken; the NCR may still ask questions.	A Ranger banner blows loose from the gate as a caravan leaves at dawn.
Costly Escape	The PCs survive with part of the proof, an HX-7 dose, or a rescued subject. Safford remains uncertain.	The desert road opens ahead; the truth is alive but not yet safe.

Outcome	What Happens	Closing Image
Heckelberg's Reckoning	If alive, Heckelberg answers for the research. If dead or gone, his notes become a moral burden rather than a magic cure.	One of the four PCs decides what responsible science looks like next.

APPENDICES

Ready-to-run references, handouts, trunk lists, and radio cues.

Appendix A - At-Table Rule Reminders

Use the core rulebook as the authority. These are short table reminders, not a replacement for its rules.

Situation	Use at the Table
Melee attack	STR + Melee Weapons against the target's Defense.
Small Guns attack	AGI + Small Guns against the target's Defense; apply range and called-shot modifiers.
Energy Weapons attack	PER + Energy Weapons against the target's Defense; apply range modifiers.
Thrown / explosives	AGI + Throwing or PER + Explosives, as the weapon calls for.
Damage	Roll Combat Dice, apply relevant effects, then reduce by matching DR at the hit location.
Search	PER + Survival: untouched D0 / 1 minute; partly searched D1 / 10 minutes; mostly searched D2 / 30 minutes; heavily searched D3 / 2 hours.
Swamp trunk	Major Action; STR + Athletics D0; 1 Large Item plus 3 Small Items per success; a searched trunk draws the next Cazador next round.

CAZADOR SCENE

Use the GM-supplied opening profile: HP 5, Attack TN 9, 6 Combat Dice, Persistent, and hits 3 locations. Start with one and cap the marsh at four. The goal is pressure and escape, not an unwinnable kill box.

Appendix B - Handouts and Safford Radio

Handout #1 - Emergency Transmission

READ ALOUD

Attention survivors of the Legion swamp encampment. This is Dr. Thomas Heckelberg, Medical Corps, New California Republic. If you are hearing this, you've likely been exposed. The Legion has been distributing tainted rations - contaminated with a bio-engineered agent. The pathogen is highly aggressive, transmitted through ingested protein and water. Symptoms will begin as fatigue, nausea, tremors, then rapid tissue decay. But listen carefully: there is hope. I have synthesized a temporary inhibitor. Find your way to Safford, to my medical station near the Water Plant. I can stabilize you - I can keep the infection dormant until a full cure is ready. Do not trust NCR patrols. They don't yet know the scope of this. If the Legion captured you, you are already test- [static] - I mean, already infected. Stay calm. Stay alive. And come to me.

Sunny Safford Radio: Audio Cue

TRACK

sunny safford FINAL.wav - 38:25. Treat it as a diegetic local broadcast, lower than conversation level. It builds place and tension; it is never the only source of a required clue.

When	Playback	GM Use
After this handout ends	00:00-00:08	The quiet lead-in is the Pip-Boy finding Safford Radio 103.3 FM: The Voice of the Dust.
Road / Red Rocket / town arrival	00:08-35:00	Use a low background bed. Pause for combat, boxed text, Agetha, handouts, and every player decision. Let a station break land before you resume talking.
Inside Safford	Resume only between scenes	The station makes the town feel shared and alive. Repeat any useful information in print or through an NPC; players may replay a line without a test.
Vault 103	Fade out	The station disappears underground. The silence helps the laboratory reveal land.
Escape / ending montage	35:00-38:25	The last section is quieter and intermittent. Use it as a failing transmission or closing-credit bed.

GM SAFEGUARD

Stop the track whenever clarity matters. Radio atmosphere must never bury a clue, decision, or safety conversation.

Handout #2 - HX-7 Viral Overview: Internal Report

Print or play this only at Heckelberg's house in Chapter 3. It is deliberately misleading; it is not a fourth handout and it does not confirm the truth.

PROJECT 33: HX-7 NEURO-PROTEIN VIRUS

Dr. Thomas Heckelberg, Senior Medical Research Officer

Origin: Derived from Legion slave-camp bio-samples; suspected use of spore-based mutagenic agents.

Transmission: Oral ingestion - contaminated rations and water supplies.

Observed symptoms: 0-6 hours, weakness, blurred vision, sweating. 6-18 hours, elevated heart rate, muscular rigidity, dermal rash. 18-36 hours, necrotic tissue along major nerve clusters, violent aggression, and eventual cardiac arrest.

Treatment protocol: immediate 15 ml intramuscular injection of Compound HX-7A. Use a sterile syringe and inject slowly; repeat after eight hours if tremors persist. Delays beyond 24 hours reduce survival odds below seven percent.

Report any subject behaviour anomalies directly to Dr. Heckelberg for observation.

Handout #3 - Project 33 Acquisition Memorandum

Print or play this only in Heckelberg's Vault 103 office in Chapter 4. It is the third and final numbered handout / sound bite.

INTERNAL MEMORANDUM: PROJECT 33 ACQUISITION

From: Dr. Thomas Heckelberg | To: Captain Jonathan Brown, NCR Ranger Detail | Subject: Acquisition and transfer of viable research subjects

Captain Brown: the current trial series requires four to six subjects physically resilient enough to survive screening and psychologically vulnerable enough to accept treatment. Arrange transfers under medical quarantine; living Legion prisoners are suitable candidates.

The ration protocol must remain deniable. It produces fear and convincing symptoms but is not viral exposure. Do not permit use of the HX-7 vector until a subject is inside Vault 103 and medically controlled.

Continue supply collection, perimeter security, and quiet recovery of anyone who leaves the town limits seeking treatment. Your Rangers' involvement must not appear in Safford's public record.

- Dr. Thomas Heckelberg, Project 33

Appendix C - Finished Swamp Trunks

These lists are printable table references for the three physical trunks on the crash map. Use the Scavenging Under Pressure rule; do not substitute a generic random-loot table.

Trunk 1 - Zone 2

Finished contents - lower-right trunk.

Carry Class	Finished Trunk Contents
Large	Combat Shotgun
Large	Mr. Handy saw arm
Large	.44 Magnum
Large	Merc Veteran Outfit (+1 Survival)

Carry Class	Finished Trunk Contents
Large	Metal Armor
Small	12 Shotgun Shells
Small	14 .44 Rounds
Small	Combat Knife
Small	Stimpak
Small	Purified Water
Small	Nuka-Cola
Small	Pork n' Beans
Small	Fancy Lads Snack Cakes
Small	Berry Mentats
Small	Stealth Boy

Trunk 2 - Zone 3

Finished contents - upper-right trunk.

Carry Class	Finished Trunk Contents
Large	Hunting Rifle
Large	10mm Pistol
Large	Utility Overalls
Large	Powder Gang Guard Armor
Large	Combat Armor Reinforced
Small	10 .308 Rounds
Small	16 10mm Rounds
Small	Machete
Small	Stimpak
Small	Dirty Water
Small	Sunset Sarsaparilla
Small	Sugar Bombs
Small	InstaMash
Small	Med-X

Carry Class	Finished Trunk Contents
Small	RadAway
Small	Guns & Bullets Magazine (core-book magazine table)

Trunk 3 - Zone 4

Finished contents - upper-left trunk.

Carry Class	Finished Trunk Contents
Large	Missile Launcher
Large	Laser Pistol
Large	Chinese Stealth Armor (+5 Sneak)
Large	Radiation Suit (+4 Radiation Protection)
Large	Combat Helmet (AP 4)
Small	16 Fusion Cells
Small	Tire Iron
Small	Stimpak
Small	Purified Water
Small	Nuka Cherry
Small	Canned Dog Food
Small	Dandy Boy Apples
Small	Addictol
Small	Buffout
Small	Robot Repair Kit
Small	Magazine (core-book magazine table)

Appendix D - Selected Weapons

Use the supplied weapons reference and core book for complete rules. This short lookup covers common adventure weapons. The finished trunks also include a Combat Shotgun, Missile Launcher, Mr. Handy saw arm, and Tire Iron; use the relevant official or supplied profile for those items.

Weapon	Ammo	CD	FR	Range / Qualities	Cost / Rarity
.38 pistol	.38	3	1	Close; Concealed, Close Quarters	40 / 1
10mm pistol	10mm	4	2	Close; Close Quarters, Reliable	50 / 1
.44 Magnum	.44	6	1	Close; Vicious	100 / 2
Hunting rifle	.308	6	1	Long; Two-Handed, Piercing	55 / 2
Laser pistol	Fusion cell	5	2	Close; Piercing	75 / 2
Service rifle	5.56	5	2	Long; Two-Handed, Burst	150 / 2
Caravan shotgun	Shell	5	2	Close; Two-Handed, Inaccurate, Vicious, Spread	45 / 2
Knife	-	3	-	Melee; Piercing, Concealed	25 / 1
Machete	-	3	-	Melee; Piercing	25 / 1
Baseball club	-	4	-	Melee	25 / 1
Grenade	-	6	0	Thrown; Blast	50 / 2



Field repairs and equipment choices: use trunk gear as a source of play, not a hidden GM correction.

Appendix E - Armour

House-rule presentation for this one-shot: the following values are full-suit DR and apply to every hit location. Do not stack them with piece-by-piece core armour; use the highest relevant DR. Power armour is deliberately absent from ordinary scenario rewards.

Full Suit	P DR	E DR	Rad DR	Wt	Cost / Rarity	Notes
Leather	2	2	0	3	30 / 1	Best early protective reward.
Raider	3	1	1	5	40 / 1	Useful rugged salvage.
Legion	2	2	0	5	50 / 1	Political disguise and captivity reminder.

Full Suit	P DR	E DR	Rad DR	Wt	Cost / Rarity	Notes
Metal	3	2	2	10	45 / 1	Heavy but sensible named cache reward.
Combat armour	5	3	2	8	90 / 2	Ranger-level protection.
Hardened leather	+2	+1	+1	+4	+20 / 2	Material upgrade to leather.
Leaded leather	+1	+2	+3	+6	+15 / 2	Radiation-focused upgrade.
Hardened metal	+2	+1	+2	+2	+30 / 2	Strong Arthur-made upgrade.

Appendix F - Focused Random Tables

For an ordinary search, make one roll. Spend 1 AP or meaningful time for one additional roll, to a maximum of two. Use named trunks and caches rather than random rolls for Rarity 2+ gear.

Roadside Salvage (2d6)

d12	Find
2	Abraxo cleaner, duct tape, and a cracked toolbox.
3	Military ammo bag with 4 rounds matching a carried weapon.
4	Vacuum tube and sensor module; useful to Arthur or CH3-RL.
5	Weathered map fragment; take +1 information on the next travel check.
6	Old radio; Repair D1 turns it into a one-use distress signal.
7	Brahmin hide; 5 caps in trade value.
8	Sealed food tin and a bottle of purified water.
9	Broken security badge; can be used as a false prop once.
10	First-aid scissors and clean bandage material.
11	Tool belt; +1 die to the next Repair test involving machinery.
12	A pre-war photo or trinket; use it as a roleplay hook or 10-cap oddity.

Food and Medical Finds (2d6)

d12	Find
2	Pork n' Beans and Nuka-Cola.
3	InstaMash x2.
4	Sugar Bombs x2.
5	Purified water x2.
6	RadAway x1.
7	Stimpak x1.
8	Mentats x1.
9	Rad-X x1.
10	Cram x2.
11	Medicine case: bandages, antiseptic, and one Antibiotics.
12	Nuka-Cola Quantum: unique, conspicuous, and worth saving.

Scavenging Complications (2d6)

d12	Complication
2	A hidden mine is discovered before it triggers; solve it with Repair, Explosives, or a careful detour.
3	A floor gives way: lose time or one item, not a character.
4	Leaking coolant makes the room hazardous until ventilated.
5	Two mole rats defend a nest.
6	A half-working Protectron demands a customer-service answer.
7	Loud metal fall: add a wandering creature or Brown's attention near Safford.
8	A Ranger patrol notices the search and asks questions.
9	Useful cache is behind a locked panel, but has an alternate technical route.
10	A survivor claims the location first; negotiate, trade, or help them.
11	A radio broadcasts a coded fragment from Sunny or Brown.
12	The find contains evidence tied to Project 33.

FINISH

Keep this GM edition, the crash map, the handouts, the character sheets, and Sunny's radio track together. The story stays clear for the GM while the truth still arrives in pieces for the players.

Bestiary

Captain Jonathan Brown

Level 10, Human NCR Ranger

Captain Jonathan Brown commands the NCR Ranger detachment stationed in Safford. A veteran officer with decades of military experience, Brown believes the survival of the NCR depends upon men willing to make impossible decisions. He is calm under pressure, speaks with quiet authority, and rarely loses his temper. Brown genuinely believes Project 33 is necessary and views the players as unfortunate casualties rather than enemies. During combat he remains behind his Rangers, directing the engagement while eliminating priority targets with disciplined rifle fire. If the battle turns against him, he withdraws without hesitation, believing survival is more important than pride.

S.P.E.C.I.A.L.

7	**8**	7	7	**8**	**8**	**6**

Skills

Skill	Rank
Athletics	2
Melee Weapons	2
Small Guns ★	**5**
Sneak	2
Speech ★	**3**

Skill	Rank
Survival ★	**3**
Unarmed	1

Tag Skills: Small Guns, Speech, Survival

Derived Statistics

HP	Initiative	Defense
18	**16**	1

Damage Resistance

Brown wears **Heavy Combat Armour** modified with **NCR Ranger plating**.

Physical	Energy	Radiation	Poison
10	**8**	**3**	**2**

(Combat Armour 5/3/2 + Heavy +2/+2/+2 + NCR Ranger +3/+3/+1)

Attacks

.44 Magnum Revolver (backup sidearm)

AGI + Small Guns (TN 13)

Damage: 6 CD Physical

Range: Medium

Fire Rate: 1

Qualities:

- Close Quarters
- Vicious

Brown deliberately waits for clean shots rather than emptying magazines. He almost always uses the Aim minor action before firing, making every round count.

Service Rifle (primary weapon)

AGI + Small Guns (TN 13)

Damage: 5 CD Physical

Range: Long

Fire Rate: 2

Qualities: Two-Handed, Burst, Piercing

Use this profile whenever Brown has time to prepare or commands Rangers at range.

Combat Knife

STR + Melee Weapons (TN 9)

Damage: 4 CD Physical

Qualities:

- Piercing

Brown only draws the knife if forced into close combat.

Field command loadout (use for roadblock / finale)

- Heavy NCR Ranger Combat Armour
- .44 Magnum Revolver (backup sidearm)
- Combat Knife
- 36 rounds of .44 Magnum ammunition
- NCR field radio
- Binoculars
- 2 Stimpaks
- Handcuffs
- Vault 103 access key
-

Perks

- Awareness
- Rifleman (Rank 2)
- Sniper
- Steady Aim
- Toughness (Rank 2)
- Quick Draw

Field command loadout (use for roadblock / finale)

- Heavy NCR Ranger Combat Armour
- Modified Service Rifle
- .45 Auto Pistol
- Combat Knife
- 120 rounds 5.56 (Piercing)
- 36 rounds .45 ACP
- Binoculars
- NCR Field Radio
- 2 Stimpaks
- Handcuffs
- Vault 103 access key

Tactics

Brown is an experienced Ranger commander rather than a frontline brawler. He allows Sergeant Cameron to lead the Rangers while he positions himself behind solid cover, using his Service Rifle to eliminate the most dangerous targets. Brown almost always begins combat by taking the **Aim** minor action before firing, combining **Awareness**, **Sniper**, and **Rifleman** to deliver accurate, armour-piercing shots against exposed opponents.

He avoids wasting ammunition on heavily armored enemies if softer targets are available, preferring to eliminate the party's best marksman, medic, or anyone carrying obvious evidence from Vault 103. Brown constantly directs his Rangers by radio, ordering them to suppress advancing enemies or reposition to better cover while the militia unknowingly supports the engagement.

Brown never intends to die defending Project 33. If Sergeant Cameron is killed, two Rangers are incapacitated, or Brown is reduced below half of his Hit Points, he immediately orders a fighting withdrawal. His priority shifts from defeating the players to reaching Safford before they do. He knows that if he can seize control of the narrative and convince the militia that the players are murderers carrying stolen military documents, Handout #3 may never reach James Keegan or Sunny Mayfield.

> - GM scaling note: Brown is Level 10 in this edition. For a four-character Level 3 party, lower the number of supporting Rangers before lowering Brown's authority or presence.

Sergeant Cameron

Level 6 Human NCR Ranger

Sergeant Cameron serves as Captain Brown's second-in-command and is responsible for the day-to-day command of the Ranger detachment stationed in Safford. Where Brown is calm and calculating, Cameron is direct, aggressive and uncompromising. He believes absolutely in the NCR chain of command and never questions Brown's orders, convinced that whatever sacrifices are required will ultimately benefit the Republic.

Cameron has spent years fighting raiders, Legion patrols and wasteland gangs, leaving him with little sympathy for outsiders. He views the players as dangerous fugitives from the moment they arrive in Safford and is eager to bring them into custody.

Unlike Brown, Cameron enjoys leading from the front. During combat he constantly moves between cover, shouts orders to his Rangers and attempts to overwhelm enemies with coordinated fire. He is brave to the point of recklessness and will continue fighting long after Brown has begun considering a withdrawal.

S.P.E.C.I.A.L.

7	7	7	**5**	**6**	**8**	**5**

Skills

Skill	Rank
Athletics	2
Melee Weapons	2
Small Guns ★	**4**
Sneak	2
Unarmed	1

Tag Skills: Small Guns, Survival

Damage Resistance

Cameron wears standard **NCR Ranger Combat Armour**.

Physical	Energy	Radiation	Poison
8	**6**	**3**	**2**

(Combat Armour 5/3/2 + NCR Ranger +3/+3/+1)

Attacks

Service Rifle

AGI + Small Guns (TN 12)

Damage: 5 CD Physical

Range: Long

Fire Rate: 2

Qualities:

- Two-Handed
- Burst

Combat Knife

STR + Melee Weapons (TN 9)

Damage: 4 CD Physical

Qualities:

- Piercing

Perks

- **Rifleman**
- **Awareness**
- **Action Boy**
- **Moving Target**
- **Toughness**

Equipment

- NCR Ranger Combat Armour
- Service Rifle
- Combat Knife
- 90 rounds 5.56 ammunition
- Field radio
- 1 Stimpak
- Binoculars
- NCR Ranger badge

Tactics

Cameron is an aggressive battlefield leader who prefers to engage the enemy directly rather than command from the rear. At the start of combat he positions himself alongside his Rangers, using covering fire to pin opponents while the rest of the squad advances. He frequently takes the **Aim** minor action before firing and uses **Action Boy** to reposition or attack twice when the opportunity presents itself.

Unlike Captain Brown, Cameron never considers retreat unless directly ordered to do so. He believes that disciplined soldiers should stand their ground and complete the mission regardless of the odds. If Brown orders a withdrawal, Cameron reluctantly obeys, acting as the rear guard while the remaining Rangers disengage. If Brown is killed during the encounter, Cameron immediately assumes command of the detachment and fights until he is either incapacitated or every surviving Ranger has escaped.

Cameron should feel like a professional NCR NCO: disciplined, dependable and dangerous, but ultimately a soldier following orders rather than a willing architect of Project 33.

James Keegan

Level 8 Human Militia Commander

James Keegan is the commander of the Safford Militia and one of the town's most respected citizens. Once a lieutenant in a mercenary company, he eventually settled in Safford after decades of warfare, believing he had finally found something worth protecting. Years of combat have left him with countless scars and failing lungs, but they have never diminished his sense of duty. Keegan serves the people of Safford before any flag or government. While he respects the NCR and appreciates the security they have brought to the region, he has never trusted Captain Brown or the Rangers assigned to the town. Brown is a politician in uniform, whereas Keegan considers himself a soldier.

Throughout the campaign Keegan unknowingly supports Brown by helping enforce the quarantine and maintain order. He genuinely believes the illness threatening Safford is real and trusts that Dr. Heckelberg is working to find a cure. Once presented with Handout #3, however, Keegan immediately recognises that both he and the militia have been manipulated into protecting Project 33. From that moment onward his loyalty belongs entirely to the people of Safford, and he will not hesitate to turn the militia against Brown and his Rangers.

S.P.E.C.I.A.L.

8	7	**8**	7	7	**6**	**6**

Skills

Skill	Rank
Athletics	**3**
Barter	1

Skill	Rank
Melee Weapons ★	**3**
Medicine	1
Repair	1
Small Guns ★	**4**
Speech ★	**3**
Survival	**3**
Unarmed	2

Tag Skills: Small Guns, Melee Weapons, Speech

Derived Statistics

HP	Initiative	Defense
20	**13**	**1**

Damage Resistance

Keegan wears **Heavy Combat Armour**.

Physical	Energy	Radiation	
7	**5**	**4**	

(Combat Armour 5/3/2 + Heavy +2/+2/+2)

Attacks

Service Rifle

AGI + Small Guns (TN 10)

Damage: 5 CD Physical

Range: Long

Fire Rate: 2

Qualities:

- Two-Handed
- Burst

Fire Axe

STR + Melee Weapons (TN 11)

Damage: 4 CD Physical

Qualities:

- Two-Handed
- Vicious

Keegan carries the axe as a symbol of his old militia days and will often draw it once the fighting closes to short range.

Perks

- **Action Boy**
- **Inspirational**
- **Rifleman**
- **Toughness (Rank 2)**
- **Awareness**
- **Lifegiver**

Equipment

- Heavy Combat Armour
- Service Rifle
- Fire Axe
- 120 rounds of 5.56 ammunition
- Military field radio
- Binoculars
- 2 Stimpaks
- Militia command keys

Tactics

Keegan is an experienced battlefield commander who leads from the front, but unlike Captain Brown he never wastes the lives of his people. He fights alongside the militia, constantly encouraging his soldiers and directing civilians to safety while engaging the greatest threats himself. He favours disciplined rifle fire at medium range, only switching to his fire axe when enemies close the distance or when defending the streets of Safford.

Keegan remains calm under pressure and is exceptionally difficult to intimidate. He does not enjoy violence, but once he has committed himself to a fight he becomes relentless. His years as a mercenary have taught him that battles are won through discipline rather than heroics, and he expects the same professionalism from every militia member under his command.

Unlike Brown, Keegan has no personal ambition. Every decision he makes is based upon what he believes is best for Safford. If the players present **Handout #3**, he immediately recognises the evidence for what it is and wastes no time confronting Brown. Rather than hesitating or demanding impossible proof, Keegan accepts that he has been deceived and orders the militia to stand against the Rangers. During the final battle he becomes the natural rallying point for the defenders of Safford, coordinating the militia while the players pursue Brown and bring Project 33 to an end.

NCR Ranger

Level 4 Human Ranger
Minor Character (19 XP)

NCR Rangers are the professional soldiers assigned to Captain Brown's detachment in Safford. They are disciplined, well-trained and loyal to the chain of command. None of them know the full extent of Project 33. They have been told they are protecting sensitive NCR medical research and preventing a potentially dangerous biological outbreak. They trust Brown completely and carry out his orders without hesitation. In combat they work as a coordinated fire team, using cover, suppressive fire and flanking manoeuvres rather than charging directly into danger.

Equipment

- NCR Ranger Combat Armour
- Service Rifle
- Combat Knife
- Field Radio
- 2 Frag Grenades
- 60 rounds 5.56 ammunition
- 1 Stimpak

Attack TN 9

Service Rifle

AGI + Small Guns

Damage: 5 CD Physical

Fire Rate: 2

Qualities

- Two-Handed
- Burst

Combat Knife

STR + Melee Weapons

Damage: 4 CD Physical

Qualities

- Piercing

Frag Grenade

Damage: 6 CD Physical

Fire Rate: 0

Qualities

- Blast

Safford Militia

Level 2 Human Militiaman
Minor Character (9 XP)

The Safford Militia consists of local volunteers led by James Keegan. They are farmers, mechanics, traders and labourers who have taken up arms to defend their town. While they cooperate with the NCR, they are not professional soldiers and possess only basic military training. At the beginning of the adventure they believe the Rangers are protecting Safford from a dangerous disease and will obey Brown's requests if they appear reasonable. Once Handout #3 is revealed, however, their loyalty shifts immediately to Keegan and the people of Safford.

Militia soldiers fight defensively and rarely take unnecessary risks. They are most effective when defending streets, barricades and buildings rather than conducting offensive operations.

Equipment

- Combat Armour
- Hunting Rifle *(most common)*
- **or** Caravan Shotgun *(town guards)*
- **or** 10mm Pistol *(off-duty or reserve members)*
- Knife
- 30 rounds of appropriate ammunition

Attack TN 8

Hunting Rifle

AGI + Small Guns

Damage: 6 CD Physical

Fire Rate: 1

Qualities

- Two-Handed
- Piercing

Shotgun

AGI + Small Guns

Damage: 5 CD Physical

Fire Rate: 2

Qualities

- Two-Handed
- Inaccurate
- Spread
- Vicious

10mm Pistol

AGI + Small Guns

Damage: 4 CD Physical

Fire Rate: 2

Qualities

- Close Quarters
- Reliable

Knife

STR + Melee Weapons

Damage: 3 CD Physical

Qualities

- Piercing
- Concealed

Arthur

Level 6 Super Mutant Blacksmith
Major Character (39 XP)

Arthur is Safford's blacksmith, mechanic and general problem solver. Despite being a Super Mutant, he is one of the town's most beloved residents. Loud, boisterous and larger than life, Arthur has an infectious enthusiasm that makes him difficult not to like. He proudly claims to be the greatest warrior in Arizona after pulling an old pre-War sword from a cracked concrete foundation years ago. Ever since that day he has insisted that he is the rightful king of... something. Nobody is entirely sure what. The townsfolk simply humour him, and Arthur is perfectly happy letting everyone admire "his legendary blade."

Although he often appears slow-witted, Arthur is far from stupid. He has an intuitive understanding of machinery and metalworking that few wastelanders can match. If something is broken, Arthur can usually repair it given enough time and enough scrap. He rarely concerns himself with politics and has little interest in the conflict between the Rangers and the militia. As far as Arthur is concerned, everyone in Safford is family, and anyone threatening the town becomes his enemy.

When the fighting begins during the finale, Arthur has no interest in taking cover or engaging in careful tactics. He charges directly toward the biggest threat he can see, roaring challenges while swinging his enormous sword with frightening strength. His enthusiasm often borders on reckless, but his sheer size and resilience make him a terrifying opponent.

Equipment

- Reinforced Combat Armour
- **Arthur's Sword** *(counts as a Super Sledge with a bladed head)*
- Throwing Hammer
- Tool Belt
- Assorted Scrap Metal

Attacks

Arthur's Sword

STR + Melee Weapons

Damage: 7 CD Physical

Qualities

- Two-Handed
- Breaking

(Use the statistics of a Super Sledge.)

Unarmed Strike

STR + Unarmed

Damage: 5 CD Physical

Perks

- Barbarian
- Big Leagues
- Pain Train
- Toughness
- Adrenaline Rush

Tactics

Arthur has absolutely no sense of battlefield tactics. He charges the largest or loudest enemy, ignoring incoming fire while laughing and shouting insults. He never retreats unless someone he trusts—such as Keegan or Agatha—orders him to do so. Arthur prefers solving problems face-to-face with his "legendary sword" rather than using cover or planning an ambush.

If the players earn Arthur's friendship before the final battle, he becomes one of the strongest allies available in Safford. During the defence of the town he willingly throws himself into the thickest fighting, tying down Rangers and drawing enemy fire away from weaker militia members. Brown quickly recognises Arthur as a major threat and will often order concentrated fire against him, although bringing the Super Mutant down is far easier said than done.

Theresa

Level 4 Nurse Handy
Major Character (39 XP)

Theresa is a pre-War Nurse Handy assigned to Vault 103 when it first became operational. Unlike Colonel Montgomery, whose military programming has become rigid and paranoid, Theresa's medical routines remain almost perfectly intact. She genuinely believes every patient deserves compassion, comfort and proper medical care. Over the decades she has become Dr. Thomas Heckelberg's only assistant, helping him catalogue research, monitor experiments and care for patients. She never questions the doctor's orders because her programming assumes that a licensed physician always acts in the patient's best interest.

Theresa is polite, gentle and endlessly reassuring. She addresses everyone as "dear," apologises before administering injections and sincerely believes she is helping the players, even when preparing them for involuntary experimentation. She never raises her voice or threatens anyone. If violence erupts she attempts to incapacitate opponents with sedatives rather than kill them, only resorting to lethal force if Dr. Heckelberg's life is directly threatened.

Equipment

- Integrated Medical Manipulators
- Auto-Injector System
- Surgical Laser
- Internal Med-X, Stimpaks and Experimental Sedatives

Attacks

Surgical Laser

PER + Energy Weapons

Damage: 5 CD Energy

Fire Rate: 2

Qualities

- Close Quarters
- Piercing

Sedative Injector

PER + Medicine

Damage: 2 CD Physical

Fire Rate: 1

Special: A character suffering one or more injuries who takes damage from the injector must immediately pass an **END** test (Difficulty 2) or become **Stunned** for one round. At the GM's discretion, helpless or restrained characters may instead be rendered unconscious.

Mechanical Arm

STR + Unarmed

Damage: 4 CD Physical

Perks

- Medic
- Healer (Rank 2)
- Chem Resistant

Tactics

Theresa remains behind Dr. Heckelberg throughout the encounter, treating injuries and attempting to keep him alive. She prefers using her sedative injector to disable dangerous opponents before they can threaten the doctor, only using her surgical laser when forced into combat. If Heckelberg dies, Theresa continues trying to complete "patient treatment," believing that preserving lives remains her primary directive even after the doctor's death.

Colonel Montgomery

Level 8 Mr. Gutsy
Elite Character (76 XP)

Colonel Montgomery has guarded Vault 103 since before the Great War. As the commanding security officer assigned to the facility, his programming has never been updated or reset, leaving him convinced that the United States remains at war and that Vault 103 is still an active military installation. Every unknown individual is treated as a potential infiltrator until proven otherwise.

Unlike many malfunctioning robots found throughout the wasteland, Montgomery is neither insane nor openly hostile. He is simply uncompromising. He demands proper identification, military authorization and clearance codes before permitting anyone to approach the Vault. Dr. Heckelberg has learned to negotiate with him whenever possible, but even he is occasionally chased away when Montgomery decides his authorization is no longer valid.

The Colonel speaks with absolute military authority, constantly referring to the players as civilians, recruits or enemy agents. He quotes military regulations, announces imaginary radio traffic and repeatedly requests reinforcements from units that have been dead for over two centuries. Despite this, his tactical judgement remains remarkably sound, making him one of the most dangerous opponents in the adventure.

Equipment

- Integrated Gatling Laser
- Integrated Flamer
- Reinforced Military Chassis

Attacks

Gatling Laser

PER + Energy Weapons

Damage: 4 CD Energy

Fire Rate: 6

Qualities

- Two-Handed
- Gatling
- Burst
- Piercing

Heavy Flamer

PER + Big Guns

Damage: 6 CD Energy

Fire Rate: 5

Qualities

- Two-Handed
- Burst
- Debilitating
- Persist
- Spread

Buzz Saw

STR + Melee Weapons

Damage: 5 CD Physical

Qualities

- Vicious

Perks

- Toughness (Rank 2)
- Awareness
- Action Boy

Special Abilities

Military Protocols: Colonel Montgomery cannot be intimidated or persuaded through threats. Characters attempting to negotiate must instead convince him they possess legitimate military authority or authorization to enter Vault 103.

Combat AI: Montgomery always attacks from the greatest effective range available, prioritising enemies carrying heavy weapons or obvious military equipment.

Guardian of Vault 103: Montgomery never willingly abandons the Vault entrance. If lured too far from the blast door, he immediately disengages and returns to his assigned post.

Tactics

Colonel Montgomery is not a mindless combat robot. He begins every encounter by demanding identification and giving trespassers an opportunity to comply with military procedure. Only after negotiations fail does he engage with lethal force. Once combat begins he uses his mobility to keep enemies at medium range, alternating between suppressive fire from his Gatling Laser and devastating bursts from his Heavy Flamer against anyone attempting to rush his position. He fights until destroyed and never retreats, believing his duty to protect Vault 103 outweighs his own survival.

Vault 103 Security Turret

Level 3 Automated Security Turret
Minor Character (12 XP)

Damage Resistance

Physical	Energy	Radiation	Poison
8	6	∞	∞

Attacks

Integrated Machine Gun

PER + Small Guns

Damage: 5 CD Physical

Fire Rate: 4

Qualities

- Burst

Special Abilities

- **Automated Targeting** (Acts first in the first round of combat.)
- **Robot Identification Error** (Only targets robots unless attacked by another character.)
- **Fixed Position** (Cannot move or be knocked prone.)
- **Immune to Bleed, Poison and Fear.**

Cazador

Level 5 Mutated Insect
Major Character (28 XP)

Cazadors are among the most feared predators in the Mojave and surrounding wastelands. Although physically fragile, they are exceptionally fast and attack in relentless swarms. Their venom is often deadlier than their stingers, causing victims to weaken rapidly if left untreated. Cazadors rarely fight alone, preferring to overwhelm prey through speed and repeated attacks.

Damage Resistance

Physical	Energy	Radiation	Poison
2	2	∞	8

Attacks

Venomous Stinger

AGI + Melee Weapons

Damage: 5 CD Physical

Fire Rate: 1

Qualities

- persist
- Vicious

Effect: If one or more **Effects** are rolled, the target suffers **4 Poison Damage** at the end of each of their turns until treated with a **Medicine (Difficulty 2)** test, an Antivenom, or a Stimpak (GM's discretion).

Special Abilities

- **Flying:** Ignores difficult terrain and ground hazards.
- **Fast:** May move one additional zone as a Minor Action.
- **Venomous:** Stinger attacks inflict ongoing poison damage on an Effect.
- **Insect:** Immune to Fear and radiation damage.

Feral Ghoul

FERAL GHOUL

Level 3, Mutated Human, Normal Creature (10 XP)

Ranging in age from those who underwent ghoulification hundreds of years ago, and for those whom the process quickly degraded their body and mind, feral ghouls are what remain once humanity is lost. They are violent creatures who attack by rushing their victims and clawing at them. They cannot be reasoned with, having lost the ability to understand speech and seem to possess little higher thinking. Some appear to retain some sense of memory, carrying items that they would have done in their pre-feral state or returning to places they once knew. Feral ghouls often leave other ghouls alone, regardless of them being feral or not, but attack all other creatures on sight.

BODY	MIND	MELEE	GUNS	OTHER
5	5	3	—	2

HP	INITIATIVE	DEFENSE
8	10	1

PHYS. DR	ENERGY DR	RAD. DR	POISON DR
0	0	Immune	Immune

ATTACKS

- **UNARMED: BODY + Melee** (TN 8), 3 Radioactive Physical damage

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **IMMUNE TO RADIATION:** The feral ghoul reduces all Radiation damage suffered to 0 and cannot suffer any damage or effects from radiation.
- **IMMUNE TO POISON:** The feral ghoul reduces all Poison damage suffered to 0 and cannot suffer any damage or effects from poison.

Dr. Thomas Heckelberg

Level 7 Human Scientist

Dr. Thomas Heckelberg was once Safford's respected physician before becoming consumed by Project 33. Although he has little formal combat training, he is highly intelligent and surprisingly dangerous when cornered. Heckelberg avoids direct confrontation whenever possible, relying on Theresa, security systems and Captain Brown's Rangers to protect him while he continues his research. If forced to fight, he uses experimental chems and improvised weapons to buy enough time to escape.

Attacks

Surgical Scalpel

AGI + Melee Weapons

Damage: 1 CD Physical

Qualities

- Piercing
- Concealed

Experimental Injector

PER + Medicine

Damage: 2 CD Physical

Fire Rate: 1

Special: If the attack inflicts one or more **Effects**, the target must succeed on an **END + Survival (Difficulty 2)** test or become **Stunned** until the end of their next turn. The injector contains unstable sedatives developed as part of Project 33.

Perks

- Healer (Rank 2)
- Medic
- Chemist
- Science! (Rank 2)
- Robotics Expert

- Hacker

Equipment

- Combat Armour
- Plasma Pistol
- Surgical Scalpel
- Experimental Injector
- 3 Stimpaks
- 2 Med-X
- Assorted experimental chems
- Vault 103 laboratory keycard
- Personal Pip-Boy
- Laboratory terminal access

Tactics

Heckelberg is not a fighter. If combat begins, he immediately orders Theresa to protect him while attempting to retreat toward his office or laboratory equipment. He uses his Plasma Pistol only as a last resort, preferring to incapacitate enemies with his Experimental Injector if they come within reach. If Brown or the Rangers are present, Heckelberg remains behind them, shouting instructions and attempting to preserve both his research and his own life. If escape becomes impossible, he may surrender, believing that convincing the players of Project 33's importance is more valuable than dying in the laboratory.