

AQUA PURA

Chapter 1

“zzzZZZZzzz”

“Gears! Wake up!”

“zzzZZZZZZzzz”

“Rusty Gears! Wake up already!”

“.....ZZZZZZzzzz.....”

Ring Spanner sighed. Some days he swore that his son could sleep through the apocalypse. The old buck had dealt with this before though and just grinned to himself. Instead of continuing to shout, he simply levitated over one of the larger wrenches he kept in their house. Taking care to cover his ears first, he swung the giant spanner with all his might, hitting an old oil drum he kept nearby for this very purpose. He uncovered his ears just in time to hear a satisfying yelp and a thud, signifying that his son was awake. Snickering a little, he left for the shop's counter; somepony had to man the only repair shop in town, eh?

“Gah!”

thud

Gears woke up on the floor. Again. This was at least the third time this month his dad had done that. He wasn't *that* hard to wake up, was he?

Taking a good long stretch, Gears shook the last shreds of sleep from his mind. Picking his way across the spare-part littered floor of the second floor bedroom he shared with his father, the young stallion wondered how his dad managed to find anything in this chaos. He said it was “organized chaos”, but Gears didn’t buy it. The bedroom itself wasn’t all that large, which only served to impress on Gears exactly how much stuff was stuffed in there. It had once been an office, used by the pre-war employees. The corner ,right across the room when you entered, was occupied by two single beds that Gears and Spanner used. To the left of this, in the other corner, was a ladder up to the roof, with an old wardrobe right beside it. The fourth wall, dividing the room from the rest of the story, was pretty much covered floor to wall with shelves and boxes, containing bits, bobs, parts, thingamajigs and doohickeys that were too easily stolen, damaged or expensive to have standing around in the store itself.

Anything from small things like firing pins through spark batteries to a cybernetic hindleg that Spanner refused to say how he got.

It took just a few moments to get dressed. He didn't have much; he wore old StableTech engineer's overalls coupled with a homemade tool-belt. About half of the tools were mostly unneeded; after all, he was a unicorn, and very good at fixin' stuff. Why would he need tools when he had the best omnitool in existence sticking out of his head?

'Fixin' stuff' was actually a very accurate description of his job in the store; ponies would come in with broken stuff, and he'd fix it up good as new when he had the time. However, that wasn't all he was good at; he had quite a knack for pretty much anything that involved technology. It was not unusual that ponies would come in and hire him to solve a problem, and leave it to him to figure out how. He was especially proud of that one time he had saved a foals life using surgical tubing, a live chicken, a toy car, a toaster and a *lot* of duct tape.

Before trotting out of the room, Gears decided to take a quick look in the mirror that hung on the wall between the beds and the door. You never know when you'll have a chance to impress mares, eh?

Souring a little at his lack of success in that particular field, Gears decided that he looked okay enough for a normal day. His steel gray coat didn't have too many oilspots, his goatee beard was of the right length and his black mane and tail had a rather nice bedhead look going. Not that he could ever manage to make it do anything else, but he tried now and then, just for fun.

"Eyupp! Lookin' goo-... Moderately attractive." Gears sighed. A small part of his brain couldn't help but snicker at this display of self honesty. At least he didn't go around trying to be something he wasn't!

Clopping down the stairs into the old cart-wash-turned-repair-shop, he took stock of what had happened since yesterday evening. As expected, nothing much. The stairs had once ended behind a door, but the door and the corresponding wall had long ago been demolished, opening up the back room to the rest of the store. It was situated directly underneath the bedroom which Gears had just exited from and contained most of the repairing equipment he and his dad used. Separating the back of the shop from the front, directly in front of where the stairs descended, was an old counter. On the other side, the shop proper was littered with shelves and stands, most of which were filled with items of various quality and purpose. The shelves, most of which had been made from scratch by welding together scrap metal, were stocked with a wide variety of salvage

At the back of the shop, behind the counter, Spanner had set up a few workbenches, one of which was currently occupied by aforementioned orange stallion.

“So! You’re finally awake?” the old buck asked with a grin.

“Yeah, it’s kind of hard to sleep when that old barrel sounds like a grenade going off in our room,” Gears retorted sarcastically as he grabbed a can of beans for breakfast. He really liked to sleep, and being so rudely awakened wasn’t exactly his favourite way to start the day.

Chowing down on cold beans, Gears decided that he needed some music. He really liked to listen to the radio; it was wonderfully inspiring to listen about the great heroes of the Wasteland. That, and he had painstakingly built the giant radio antennae on top of the shop himself, so he felt he should damn well use it.

With a brief flash of magic, he turned the knobs on the shops radio to DJ-PON3’s station. That station was his favourite; he could find it’s frequency without actually looking on the radio. He didn’t listen to that one exclusively though; he often flipped between a variety of channels, listening to the various DJ’s.

“BZzzzzzzZtt!”

The sudden blast of static from the radio made the unicorn wince and drop his spoonful of beans back in the can. That wasn’t supposed to happen!

Turning around to face the device, Gears started to check the frequency; maybe he had turned the knob too far?

Nope. It was exactly where it was supposed to be. Furrowing his brow, Gears unplugged the radio and quickly opened it up, wondering if maybe it was an error in the wiring. After all, 200 year old technology was rickety at best.

Nope, everything seemed fine there too.

“Hey! Dad! When did the radio stop working?” he asked, turning to his father who was trying to fix up an old rifle enough to sell it.

“Eh? Oh, yeah,” Spanner said without taking his eyes off the gun. “The radio. I think it stopped working sometime last night; you should take a look at the antennae. I can’t find anything wrong with the radio itself, so it must be that one.” The old unicorn went back to his work, leaving his son to grumbly eat his breakfast in silence. Being drawn from his dreams by the dreaded Drum of Doom AND having to eat breakfast without music? Gears desperately hoped the day couldn’t get crappier than that.

“I bet the Stable Dweller and the Security Mare don’t have to deal with stuff like this...” he mumbled, swallowing the last spoonful of bean-flavoured preservatives.

Two short minutes later, he was carefully making his way over the roof of the building, towards what could have been mistaken, from a distance, for a very tall heap of scrap. In reality, it was an incredibly complex radio tower, built from rare metal which Gears had singlehoofedly and valiantly liberated from hordes raiders during his scavenging tours. At least, that's what he told everypony. But the fact remained that he had built a fully functional radio antennae from the ground up, using only scrap he had found lying around. It was so well built, that on good days they even got in signals from as far away as Flankorage! He was, understandably, rather proud of it. And very, very annoyed when it broke down like this.

Sometimes, some brainless raider thought it would be funny to shoot at the shiny, round thing on the top of the cartwash.

Sometimes, the town kids kicked a hoofball or a rock at it. The unicorn foals were especially problematic; they usually trained their telekinesis by trying to hit it with rocks or empty bottles.

Or sometimes, like now, it simply broke down by itself, due to the decrepit materials it was built from. Not for the first time, and certainly not the last, Gears wished he had been born some 200 years earlier. Then, at least, he would have had some proper materials to work with!

It didn't take him very long to find the issue: some burnt out wires that needed to be replaced. While the wiring was easy, it was very time-consuming and would take him the better part of the day to finish.

After finally connecting the last cable and double checking that the radio he brought up with him worked, he finally bolted the metal cover back on and sat down to relax a bit.

Gears was currently on the highest point in town. The old skywagon wash station was one of three buildings the town had grown up around. The wash-station-turned-shop was technically only two stories, but it was situated on a small hilltop, giving it a really great view over the village. Gears sometimes went up here to relax or think; his private spot away from everypony else.

The other buildings were a former supermarket and the remains of a multistory apartment building. The latter had once been five stories high, but the topmost floor had collapsed ages ago. It was obvious from the ruins around them that there had been many more similar buildings before the war, but now only those three were left. Of course, many new "buildings" had popped up latter; rickety shacks made from scavenged wood and metal were all over the town.

Around the motley collection of buildings was a small barrier, made out of various blocks of stone, garbage and dirt. It had been there as long as Gears could remember, and Spanner had told him the walls had been there when he arrived too. Gears concluded that the village was at least two generations old, but it was probably much older.

Suddenly, he caught a glimpse of something between the decrepit buildings far outside the

village.

Squinting in an attempt to make out what it was, he slowly rose to his hooves. The settlement always had to be on guard for raiders and bandits, as well as new trading caravans, albeit for different reasons.

The town survived mostly on trade; whenever a new caravan came into town, it was well taken care of, in the hopes that it would make them a regular stop on it's journey.

Deciding it was too far to see anything with his bare eyes, Gears grabbed his tools and trotted back into the building, using the ladder that went down a hole in the roof and into their bedroom. Coming back up again with a small pair of binoculars floating beside him, he positioned himself on the edge of the roof, trying to get a good look. One of the lenses was cracked and useless, but the other worked fine.

He couldn't quite believe what he saw. He frowned, taking a rag from his belt to clean out the functional lense a bit. Satisfied, he put the binoculars up to his eyes again. There! Unmistakably, that was not just a caravan, but a caravan consisting of Steel Rangers!

Gears barely knew what to say once he had raced downstairs; power armor was incredibly rare in the Wastes. He had only ever seen them in pictures on the posters that littered the ruins of the city. However, everypony had heard stories about their wearers, the Steel Rangers. And now, what looked like an entire convoy of them were marching towards the town!

He couldn't help but be exited; power armor represented some of the most advanced pre-war technology that was still around and working. He had even read in one of Spanners old books that it repaired itself when needed!

It didn't take long before most of the town was assembled. Even a normal caravan would get the town on its feet in no time, and this one had them there before anypony could say "cupcake". After all, they *could* be there to trade; no pony really knew what Steel Rangers actually did, it seemed, except that they liked pre-war technology. At any rate, nobody relished the possibility of pissing off a herd of heavily armed and armoured ponies.

[insert section friend here]

As soon as the Steel Rangers came into hollering range, they wasted no time in telling the town who they were.

"This is Technology Retrieval Squad Phi of the Steel Rangers! This is Paladin Copper Wire speaking, and we demand that you let us use your town as a base of operations while we are in

this area!”

Mayor Bottlecap trotted up to the top of the wall.

“Of course!” she bellowed. “We’ll gladly let you stay in our town... provided you pay for yourself.”

Gears couldn’t see what the Steel Ranger reaction was; like the majority of the town, his view was blocked by the walls. In the brief moment it took for them to answer, the silence was deafening; everypony was hoping they wouldn’t decide to take the city by force. Gears berated himself for not being armed; his weapon was lying in a drawer at home.

“Very well; we will pay for food and lodgings,” the Paladin’s voice sounded from the other side of the barrier. “We will also offer to pay for any information you might have about nearby caches of pre-war technology.”

Oh! That’s good news! We might even profit from this... Gears thought, more or less echoing the thoughts of the rest of the town. They lived in the ruins of the industrial section, so there was plenty of salvage around; maybe the Rangers were interested in some?

The major, who also doubled as security chief, signaled the guards stationed on the wall to lower their rifles and open the gate. They were only too happy to comply: pointing at Steel Rangers with anything deadlier than a stick probably wouldn’t end well.

The Rangers trotted in as the gathered ponies murmured amongst themselves about which info they could sell, and which they could not. Some places were really dangerous to scavenge, they could sell those. It’s not like they could use them themselves, right?

While the rest of the town began to disperse, Gears remained, his curiosity demanding to be sated. This was the first and, likely, the last time he would ever have the chance to get a good look at power armor, and he wasn’t about to waste it.

The Ranger convoy consisted of the Paladin who lead them, three other ponies in power armor, plus 4 ponies in something that Gears could only describe as “robes”. Two of the power-armored ponies were pulling a huge, empty cart.

Probably going to be used to transport the stuff they salvage. Gears thought, briefly wondering what kind of technology they were even interested in, before shifting his focus to the power armour they wore.

“...yeah, that one,” Paladin Copper Wire said. “He must know of some place, since he’s standing there staring at us.”

I wonder how that armour of theirs repairs itself...

“Yes sir,” one of the other armoured ponies replied. “I will go talk to him at once.”

It must obviously be some kind of old talisman...

“Hey!” a baritone voice sounded. “Kid! Do you have any information you want to sell to the Rangers?”

If somepony could recreate such talismans, they'd be rich beyond their wildest dreams...

“... Kid,” the helmet-filtered voice prodded. “Are you even listening?”

“Gah! When did you get there?!” Gears jumped when he realized one of the Rangers was standing right in front of him.

“Uh... No. Nothing I can recall right now sir,” Gears said quickly, trying to salvage the situation.

Nice place to zone out... He thought sarcastically, smiling nervously.

“Excuse me?” the Ranger rumbled. “I am not a ‘sir’, kid!”

Lifting one hoof to the base of the helmet, the earth pony proceeded to remove the armoured head-gear, revealing a tan mare underneath.

Well... fuck. Gears decided he really didn’t want to be in front of the power-armoured mare he had just called a sir any more.

“Uh, ah...” Gears quickly cleared his throat. “Sorry, I didn’t mean, it’s just that the armour and the helmet and the voice and... Sorry?” Grinning the fakest grin in the history of fake grins, a small part of Gears’ brain briefly wondered if there would be enough left of him to bury if the Ranger decided to take offence.

“Hmpf. Very well then, I guess I accept your apology,” the red-maned mare said as she stuffed her helmet into a saddlebag.

“Well then, if you come up with anything, come find one of us at the tavern. We pay good caps for good locations,” the Ranger said before turning around and trotting in the direction of the aforementioned establishment.

Hm, that armour makes it pretty hard to make out the gender of those inside... Gears mused as he quickly retreated back home. He was not very keen on meeting more of them than necessary, even if that one had seemed nice enough.

“So, what did they want?” Gears’ dad asked, briefly looking up from his work. He hadn’t left the shop, in case somepony wanted to buy, or steal, something in their absence.

“It seems they want to use this town as a ‘base of operations’ while they search for pre-war technology around here,” Gears answered as he started towards the stairs. “They also want to buy information about any place they can get that technology; they say they’ll pay good caps for it too.”

“What? The Steel Rangers? Here?” came the shocked answer. “Hmm, I never thought I’d see them this far from their base... Not to mention actually paying for information instead of just taking it...” Spanner murmured ponderously.

Meanwhile, Gears had trotted upstairs. Usually he didn’t really stay up here during the day; the room was mainly for sleeping in, and for storing all kinds of stuff they couldn’t keep in the shop, including their personal effects.

Gears wasn’t planning to stay there for long though; he was just here to collect an item. With a brief pulse of magic, Gears opened up the drawer on the nightstand beside his bed. Out floated a leather harness, five clips of 9mm ammunition, and an SMG.

“While they say they don’t want trouble, I don’t want to be caught unprepared if they do...” he mumbled to himself as he strapped on the harness. He took a brief moment to inspect the weapon for faults before slipping it into the holster, situated on his right shoulder. After briefly inspecting the ammo clips, he secured them in specially made straps on his left shoulder.

Satisfied that the harness, weapon and ammo clips were all in order, Gears turned around to trot back down to the shop. While he could have used any of the weapons that were displayed in the shop in case of an emergency, he felt much more comfortable with this particular weapon. Gears always made sure that the SMG was in perfect condition, something he couldn’t say about the weapons in the shop. Who could say when they would fail?

While there were loads of guns lying around in the building, there were way too many for Gears and his dad to fix. Mostly, they just traded guns and such without actually bothering to fix them, it would simply take too long. However, they were always working on some project, often cannibalizing the items in the worst condition for spare parts. The fully fixed pieces usually sold for more than enough to make up the cost.

The tingle of the old bell above the shop door shook Gears from his thoughts, and he quickly cantered to the counter to help whoever had entered the building.

“Hello,” Gears called out in an attempt to mimic his fathers ‘selling-voice’. “How can I help yoOOOuh?” Gears leapt behind the closest piece of cover as soon as he saw who had

entered.

Ohshitohshitohshit, there's a Steel Ranger standing in the shop!

"Hey, is this your shop?" The armoured pony had obviously seen him. There was no point in hiding; somepony had to be there, and his dad would probably call him a pussy if he didn't.

Coughing to clear his throat, Gears trotted into view from behind the piece of sky-wagon wall he had been using to hide. "Ah, yes, this is me and my dad's repairshop. Welcome to Full-Service; my name is Rusty Gears. How may I help you?"

The Steel Ranger just shrugged, turning to scan the shop with an interested look. "I'm just here to look; we sometimes find interesting things in shops like this," she said.

As she turned her back to him, Gears dared take a closer look. She was the same mare who had talked to him earlier today; tan coat with a red, silver-striped mane. Gears couldn't tell her cutie mark, because she was still in her armour, though she had seemingly left her helmet with the other rangers. Beside a set of saddlebags, her back supported a battle-saddle which carried an assault rifle. Gears couldn't help but noticed that the rifle was in a horrible condition; he doubted it'd last much longer before breaking apart.

"Excuse me ma'am..." Gears began, taking care to address her by her proper gender this time.

"Silver Scales." The mare interrupted as she slowly walked around the shop, glancing between various bits and bobs in the shop.

"Eh?"

"My name is Silver Scales."

"Ah, I see. Well, miss Scales, I just noticed that..."

"Just 'Silver' is fine, thank you," she interrupted again. She had completed a full circuit of the shop and was now facing the counter again.

"Ah, eh, yes, Silver, I just noticed that your rifle is in a rather bad condition. Did you bring it here to get fixed up...?"

"Hm? My rifle? Nah, it's okay. I've been using it since it was issued years ago; hasn't broken down yet." The blue-eyed mare seemed oblivious to the state of her weapon.

"But... it will. Probably very soon too. Could I at least take a look at it...?" Gears almost pleaded. She could easily lose her life if she used a weapon that badly damaged! What if it broke down in

a fight?

"No, only Steel Ranger technicians are allowed to 'fix up' Ranger equipment, and... wait," Silver suddenly interrupted herself. "Is that a Stable jumpsuit?" She asked, spotting Spanner sitting by a workbench, facing away from them.

"Hm? Yeah, this is a Stable jumpsuit. Why are you asking?" Spanner turned his head halfway around to look at Silver. The Steel Ranger quickly composed herself, and replied.

"Well, I'd like to know where you got your hooves on it, sir."

"Well, I got it the day I turned eighteen. I grew up in a Stable y'know. It's abandoned now though; half of it caved in some thirty years ago." Spanner grinned almost un-noticeably.

"So, this Stable... No pony lives there now, right? Do you mind telling me where it is, please?" Silver smiled sweetly.

Gears was thoroughly invested in the conversation now; while he had known his dad was a Stable Dweller, he hadn't really thought much about it. He certainly hadn't thought that the Steel Rangers would want the location of the old Stable! His old man had always made it seem like it was nothing special.

"Hmm..." Spanner turned around and tapped his forehoof to his lips in thought. "Nah. Not without you paying me, at least."

"Very well then. Is..." Silver went silent for a moment, furrowing her brow slightly in thought. "...A hundred caps okay?"

"Seven hundred," Spanner answered without missing a beat.

To Silver's credit, she didn't lose her cool. "Two hundred," she countered.

"Six hundred and fifty," Spanner said, turning back to his work.

"Three hundred," The ranger replied hopefully.

"Six hundred," The older buck said dismissively, not looking up from his project.

"Four hundred," Silver replied tersely, obviously displeased that the price had gone up as high as it did.

The Stable pony turned his attention back to the armoured mare. "Five hundred and fifty."

"Five hundred," Silver said, slamming her armoured hoof on the counter hard enough to make Gears jump. "And that's my last offer."

"Deal." Spanners said after a brief moment of consideration. "You're a hard bargainer, Silver."

"Likewise," Silver replied, a slight grin on the corner of her mouth.

"My son here knows where the entrance is," Spanner said. "I can't leave the store, but he can show you the way. You remember the path, don't you?"

"Yeah, I think I can recall it," Gears replied after a short while. "When do we leave? It takes about half a day to get there, if I remember correctly."

"I need to go tell my superiors before I can say that, but I think that tomorrow morning would be most likely."

"I see. Where should I meet you? The Broken Bottle?" Gears gestured with a hoof in the Broken Bottle's general direction.

"Where is that?" Silver asked, sounding somewhat confused.

"That's the tavern in town; aren't you guys staying there?" Gears asked, cocking his head slightly to the side.

"Oh, yes we are. I didn't notice the name though. Somepony will come by later tonight to when to meet up," Silver said before turning towards Spanner.

"I'll also talk to the Paladin about your payment. At best you'll get half of the caps before we leave, and half when we return."

"Fair enough. But I wouldn't send my son with you if the info wasn't good y'know."

Silver just shrugged as she turned and walked towards the exit, leaving Gears and Spanner to prepare for the formers trip.

Once she had left, Spanner turned to Gears and grinned slyly. "And that's how you make money from useless information. If they want any of the remaining technology there, they'll have to either dig their way through tons of earth, or open doors that have been locked for decades."

Gears snickered as he realized they had pretty much just gotten a big pile of free caps. Still, the mirth was tempered by another realization; his dad had just conned a squad of Steel Rangers, and that he would be with them when they figured out.

Suddenly, all mirth fled. "Fuck! I forgot to convince her let me take a look at that rifle!"

Footnote: Level up.

New trait: Home-schooled; You have learned everything you know from Dad! You gain +5 skill in Barter, Guns, Medicine, Repair, Science, Survival and Speech! However, Dad doesn't know everything, and some skills have been neglected. You have -5 skill in Big Guns, Energy Weapons, Explosives, Lockpick, Melee weapons, Sneak and Unarmed.

New Perk: Gun Nut; You are talented with the maintenance and use of a wide variety of conventional firearms. With each rank of this perk, you gain additional 5 points to the Guns and Repair skill.

Authors note:

Well, thanks for reading! I hope you enjoyed my little jab at Kkat's universe.

I'd like to just give a little shout-out to Kashin for helping me betaread this story ^^

He's the author of the story "Fallout: Equestria, Operation Flankorage". Go read it! =D

And also thanks to bdk336 for helping me too!