

Once Carlos was finished feeding the recently picked plants into the chute, we headed right back to the main hall, where everyone was waiting for us. I had no reason to adjust what the medbay was working to produce, as we already had everything we needed, so it was just generating things to sell, specifically bandages and stuff for Dr. Berker.

"Alright, so the good news is that the medicinal plants do count toward the medbays resources," I revealed as we entered the main hall, and I dropped down at the head of the combined tables. "The bad news is that we are limited to how much we can take from the immediate area around the connection point. There are a few tribes nearby, most immediately the Oakanrest. If we start aggressively harvesting the area, that's going to piss them off pretty quickly."

"We can't take any?" Madison asked. "How large is this tribe?"

"We... don't actually know how big it is," Joseph responded, looking to me for confirmation, which I gave him with a nod. "Considering we've only met three members, it can't be *too* large, but..."

"Their size isn't the point, though," I explained, shaking my head. "The connection point is basically the edge of their territory, and part of their hunting grounds. Heavily harvesting this area would likely prevent them from getting what they need and probably leave them pretty antagonistic toward us. If we want to strip an area down..."

"We would need to go to *our* hunting grounds," Carlos said, shaking his head. "Which means a nice long walk up the river."

"Which is a time-wasting pain that really reduces the handiness of the concept," I pointed out. "I'm hoping we find a way to grow them ourselves, in a way that doesn't require an actual harvest. In the meantime... we might run a few picking missions, just to compare them to our medical junk runs."

I also wanted to see what sort of tinctures and potions the people of the Oakanrest tribe had on hand. If we could convince them to share their recipes, and they worked even remotely like they did in the game, they would likely count towards the medical resources even more than the raw materials, which would drastically increase the value of our gathering missions.

That, however, was something to worry about for later, when we eventually got around to visiting this tribe, as well as finding out what we would be able to trade with them. Food was likely going to be worth something, but not in large amounts, as they were no doubt self-sufficient. They would also not likely be interested in the weapons we had available, since they wouldn't be able to make ammo. Toando and Yalna didn't seem to have any dislike for technology, but they definitely didn't like how much noise our guns made.

"Would we be doing one of those today?" Leon asked, and I shook my head, referring to a harvest run in the Horizon world.

"No, no, it's too late in the day for that," I said with a frown. "I'm going to be spending the rest of these caps on more upgrades, then we can call it an early night."

"What else are you going to buy?"

"Right off the bat, I want the armory," I explained. "Having a direct line to upgrading our gear is definitely something I want. The radio room attachment for the HQ is also something I would like, but with how cheap it is, I have a feeling it's not going to be anything groundbreaking. After that, I want to upgrade the barracks once, before spreading the rest of the caps around and upgrading things like the doors, windows, and wherever else."

"What about the Salvage Hut?" Joseph asked. "Weren't you interested in seeing what that was about?"

I frowned, chewing the inside of my cheek. I was interested, especially in its potential for interplay with the medbay.

"Okay, we can add the Salvage Hut to the list, just to get a better idea of how it works," I agreed, accepting the upgrade tablet from Maxwell. "I think that brings us below one thousand remaining caps, so let's wait before we plan any further."

Rather than purchase any new buildings, we started by upgrading the barracks. I was hoping that the barracks would actually be livable after the purchase, and I was interested in what sort of quality of life options it would open up, but mostly this was in preparation for the third level of upgrade, which was when the number of soldiers I could get doubled to sixteen.

After making the purchase, we left to inspect the building and see what its control computer had to offer. True to the description of the upgrade, the barracks did look more sturdy, with a front door that was more than a flimsy joke, and walls and a roof that looked strong enough to actually be called secure. It was also bigger, by several feet on each side, a shift that was even more obvious when you stepped into the building. The interior was not nearly as cramped, with more space for each bed as well as the living room area. Not only that, but each of the beds was larger, and after a bit of testing, we were pretty sure they were more comfortable as well, now finally at the same level as the HQ.

[All in all](#), it was improved enough that I would no longer feel guilty about having people stay inside on a regular basis. Even more so if I had enough caps left to upgrade a few aspects of every building's durability from the HQ.

"Does this mean you're going to fill the last two spots?" Carlos asked, lying back on one of the beds. "I wouldn't mind staying out here to keep an eye on them, Sir."

"... yes, I think that's probably a good idea," I said, looking around with a frown. "Getting the last two soldiers... maybe with a second medic... Damn, this is starting to get a lot more expensive really quick."

While the rest of the troops were looking around and trying out the beds, I sat down on the couch and scrawled through the options for quality of life improvements the second-level

barracks offered. At level two, the options were limited to simple things, like furniture and appliances for the barracks, but I would imagine those would get more impressive as I leveled things up. That said, I did spend twenty caps on some basic entertainment, which amounted to a self-repairing pack of cards, some dice, and a few basic board games.

After we were done inspecting the barracks, we headed back to the main hall, where I purchased the salvage hutt. It was a relatively small building, and for the first time, when I placed it on the special map, it did not have an expanded white border that the building would eventually grow into as I upgraded it.

Instead, it only had the green box, which Maxwell revealed meant the structure would not increase in size when I upgraded it. In hindsight, that was kind of obvious given the circumstances, but it was interesting. It hadn't happened before, so checking in about what it meant wasn't necessarily a bad thing either way.

With the reason confirmed, I guided the green box into place, this time settling it in the [area behind the construction yard](#). It was a bit far away from the HQ main hall, but I didn't really care as long as it was within the walls.

Going out to inspect the new building, we found a simple concrete structure, not too dissimilar from what the barracks had looked like before we upgraded it. The only really noticeable difference was that alongside its only door, there was a garage door as well. Inside the building was mostly empty, save for a few cabinets and lockers. What took up most of the room were several pallets, all laid out along the walls. Judging by the pallet jack tucked into the corner, I could only guess that scrap, generated by the structure, would fill up on the pallet, and when it was full, we could drag it out.

A quick look at the control panel showed that we had two primary options to generate, basic metal scrap and electronic scrap. The basic metal scrap had a few sub options, which seemed like a way to create metal we could build with, things like panels, reinforcements, bolts, and other options like that. The electronic scrap had no alternatives and looked like it would just generate random electronic junk.

I would get more refined options if I upgraded the hut, as well as more options for scrap. At level two, a three-hundred-cap upgrade, I would get access to bullet scrap and weapon parts.

"How much do you want to bet that bullet scrap and weapon parts can be used in the armory?" Carlos asked, reading the descriptions over my shoulder.

"No bet," I responded. "How much do you wanna bet there's a medical scrap somewhere in there as well?"

"No bet."

With the scrap options set to standard metal for now, the group once again made its way back to the main hall, where I purchased the armory, bringing my total caps down to one thousand one hundred. I quickly placed the armory [right beside the medbay](#), somewhere nice

and close in case there was ever anything I needed to get to it quickly. This building did have an extra white outline showing where it would eventually grow.

Like most level-one buildings, the armory was a simple concrete structure, not exactly impressive. Like the salvage hut, it had a garage door, and stepping inside revealed a mostly open area, containing racks for weapons, boxes for ammo, and crates for armor and other equipment, though everything was empty. There was also a recognizable chute next to the control panel, which had Carlos shouting, "Called it!"

"Right now, all it can do is ammunition," I explained, reading through the options on its control panel. "It can take ammo and turn it into other types of ammo, or take ammo scrap and turn that into various complete rounds."

"What about upgrades?"

"There are upgrades. I can give you guys the option to pick a magazine of armor-piercing ammo for your standard loadout," I answered, scrolling through the list. "I can also increase how many magazines you can carry, backed up by the HQ at least, but that costs supplies and caps. A hundred and fifty rounds of 5.56 and one hundred caps will give everyone another magazine for their rifles. The second upgrade costs a lot more than that."

"We don't have nearly that many rounds of 5.56," John pointed out. "Not even close, unless we can count the restocking stuff."

"No, that stuff never counts for things like this. We can, however, use the armory to convert all our spare and for sale ammunition, which it would accept," I explained. "It's a whole lot of conversions to basically say that our spare ammo would get us most of an upgrade."

"It might cost us caps, but having extra ammo is always a good thing," Joseph pointed out. "Would that not be a good investment?"

"It would... I wanted to get the radio, and some upgrades... and now the two extra soldiers..."

I frowned and started doing the math in my head, looking down at the variety of base-wide upgrades available. I had been hoping to reinforce the windows and the doors, but that was now out of the budget. If I wanted to keep some small change on me just in case, at least a hundred caps, all I could afford was the window upgrade.

"Alright. I'll have to skip the door reinforcement for now, but if we do that, we can afford everything I wanted and the additional mag," I said, double-checking the math in my head, before turning to look at Joseph. "You and John head back to the storage room and grab our spare ammo. Anything we don't use, plus anything we have a lot of."

Joseph nodded and headed out, with John following after him. When he returned, we started our final round of purchases. While they were converting the ammo into 5.56, I added the radio room to the HQ main hall, opposite the bedrooms. I also upgraded the windows, making them bulletproof to most pistol calibers. By the time I was done with that, we had a

hundred and fifty rounds of extra 5.56, which appeared on the shelves, packed neatly in nice, clean boxes. The conversion rate hadn't been the greatest, but considering almost all of the ammo we used would have just been sold off, it was fine. I purchased the extra magazine without any fanfare, as all the ammo we had just made vanished in a blink. No doubt the new extra magazines would be waiting for us in our rooms, just as previous upgrades to the Standard Soldiers Kit had.

"So, do we check out the radio room now, or hire two more soldiers first?" I asked my team, open to suggestions.

"Maybe we should put off hiring the soldiers until tomorrow morning," Madison suggested. "Then we can head out for the day to show them the ropes. Having something to do will help them settle in."

The others seemed to agree, so I shrugged in agreement.

"Sure, that works for me. You guys would know better than I do. Let's head back inside and check out the radio room," I suggested, nodding back towards the HQ. "Don't expect miracles, though. It was pretty cheap, which makes me think it's going to need an upgrade before it's useful."

We arrived back in the main hall to find that, by and large, I had been correct. The "radio room" was, for now at least, a simple alcove along the wall in the main hall, with a desk and chair. The ham radio we had unlocked stood beside even more radio equipment, the [new equipment looking significantly](#) more professional than a simple, scuffed, worn ham radio.

On top of the new space and new, non-portable equipment, the radio room came with two more important things. First was an actual [handheld radio](#), just one, in a matching color to the non-portable kit. It looked sturdy, and even if it wasn't, it would self-repair after forty-eight hours. It would allow us to communicate with Headquarters, which would be undoubtedly helpful.

I had been hoping for a way to communicate. Between the team, like personal comms, but with any luck, upgrading the radio room later would unlock that.

The room, or really an alcove, also came with instructions on how to use both the handheld and non-portable radio, which was a godsend. The reason we hadn't used the ham radio we received at all is that no one had any idea how to use it. With the instruction manual we now had, we would be able to understand both pieces.

Maxwell volunteered to read the manual first, since he was the one who would most often be using the non-portable kit. About half an hour after he started reading, the sounds of music began to play from the alcove, cutting a game of dice off about halfway through, so we could celebrate.

Our newly unlocked lemonade made a decent mixer with centuries-old vodka for an impromptu party.

