

The following morning, both squads headed off to work, with clear goals for the day assigned to each. Johnson led his squad, plus Carlos, through the dark door and into the Horizon world. He was tasked with hunting on our hunting grounds and dragging the corpses back to the connection point. I could have led that group, but I passed that task to Johnson as both a way for him and his team to get familiar with the Horizon world. Carlos would fill him in on what we had learned so far, and after hunting and dragging back two dozen machines, he would be in a pretty good place.

Honestly, a full squad of heavily armed soldiers was really overkill for hunting low-level Zoomorphs, especially with the armor-piercing ammo they were carrying. It was far from foolproof, the ranged weapons of some of the more dangerous zoomorphs could still hurt them, but even the larger purely melee robots wouldn't be able to get close after a full volley or two. Of course, they could still be ambushed or overwhelmed, but I trusted that they could handle the task.

Meanwhile, while Johnson and his team were learning on the job, my squad and I had gathered a variety of ammo, medicine, random tradeable goods, and a few other odds and ends. We then headed out, crossing the relatively short distance between our neighbors and us. We made good time to Megaton, arriving before noon, though my dreams of getting home early were rather quickly smashed. With our go-to weapons trader still unable to buy more, and the medical supplies market rather overstocked as well, we struggled to offload a good chunk of our goods. We were able to feed some ammo into the surrounding shops pretty easily, but the rest of our goods did not go so easily.

We did manage, eventually, though it took four hours to sell all of our goods. In the end, we only made eight hundred and fifteen caps in total, which was far below what we should have gotten. We had to significantly underprice our goods to get them moved, but by then I was too annoyed to care. We had enough to buy the stables and enough to buy upgrades if they were available, though it would likely be tight.

As we were finally making our way out of Megaton, packs lighter and my blood pressure higher, I spotted Lucas Simms approaching us from the entrance, a pair of guards on either side of him. As we met along the street, I stopped and held out my hand.

"Sheriff, good to see you again," I said with a nod, releasing his hand after a simple shake. "What can I do for you?"

"Got reports of a lot of fighting going on in Springvale," He explained. "We went to check it out and found the whole place cleared out, looted to the ground. You know anything about that?"

"Yeah, that was us," I explained with a nod, continuing before he could ask his next inevitable question. "Another squad of soldiers arrived from our main base, and I wanted to put them through their paces. Figured clearing out a raider hub was the best way to do that."

He looked at me for a long moment, his face partially shaded by his hat.

"You really cleared out a whole raider den as a test?" He asked. "How many did you lose?"

"There were a few casualties, but no deaths," I explained. "We made sure we had plenty of advantages before heading in. I didn't just throw my men at them and say, " Good luck. Superior tactics and firepower are hard to beat."

"Hmm, well, either way, it's impressive work," he admitted, though he didn't seem happy to. "Those raiders were a big concern for us, with them gone, we can all breathe a bit easier."

"I'm glad we could help," I said with a nod.

He held his hand out to one of his escorts, who placed a decent-sized bag into it. The sound it made told me it was filled with caps.

"This is payment for clearing them out," He explained, holding out the bag. "A thousand caps, which is unfortunately all I could wrangle for doing a job we didn't hire you for. That said, would you be willing to work for us again if needed? For better pay, of course."

"On a case-by-case basis, of course," I agreed, taking the bag of caps from him. "We would be happy to work with you."

"That's good to hear," he agreed, before reaching into his coat and handing me a thin piece of aluminum sheet metal. "This is our broadcast frequency. Assuming you have a radio set up that can use it, we can communicate through there."

I took the small, flat piece of metal with sanded edges, looking down at it and turning it over in my hand. Sure enough, a handful of numbers were carved into it, numbers I really hoped Maxwell would understand, as he was the one learning the complicated radio gear that we had gotten. I nodded and tucked the metal rectangle into my pocket, patting it to make sure it was secure.

"That sounds good. We will reach out so you can get our information," I added. "Unfortunately, we need to start moving now if we want to get back before it starts to get dark."

Lucas nodded, and after another handshake, we left, heading out of the town. The trek back to HQ was more or less routine at this point, which was actually cause for some alarm. I made sure to keep my people on their toes and looking out for trouble as we walked, since it was usually at the point of complacency that things really started to go wrong.

As we walked, I considered the results of our trip. We had managed to get more money than I had thought, but it was impossible for me not to feel that we had wasted our time just a bit. If Lucas had reached out sooner, like when Johnson had been visiting the day before, we wouldn't have had to make the trip at all, and could have been working with Johnson's squad gathering machine corpses.

Either way, it was too late to change anything, so I did my best to focus on what I could. After we were settled, I quickly bought the HQ version of the stables and placed it in the back,

by the [salvage hut, along the north wall](#). It had some pretty significant expansions, which I assumed would allow me to make room for more of our mounts... whatever they were going to be.

Once the stables were set, I walked around the exterior. The building's design was simple, just a big concrete structure with stable rooms set up inside, windows, and two wide barn doors on the north and south-facing walls. When I was done walking the exterior, I headed inside, mostly looking for where I would be able to upgrade the mounts. Sadly, even after thirty minutes of searching, we couldn't find anything. I could upgrade the building, of which there was no point to quite yet, but not the mounts inside the stable.

"So are we going to have to make our own saddles?" Joseph asked as we eventually gave up on looking.

"I really hope not," I said with a frown. "Maybe we will get the chance to upgrade them once we have an actual mount."

Not long after we bought the stables, Johnson and his squad returned. When we sat down for dinner, soldiers spreading out around the main hall, Carlos and Johnson went over how their day went.

We managed to drag back eight of the bastards," Johnson said. "Two trips of four."

"It was a huge pain," Carlos said, shaking his head. "Did you forget about the river crossing?"

It took me a moment to figure out what he was talking about, but when I did, I smacked my forehead. The path to getting to our hunting grounds was complicated and involved crossing a river, then walking up along the edge of an extremely steep hillside. If you didn't cross and continued following the river, you walked smack dab into a set of falls, including the cliff face that made the river crossing necessary.

And as Carlos had surmised, I had completely forgotten about that, though it seems like I wasn't the only one.

"It was nothing, just booted those freaks off the cliff and hauled 'em in at the bottom," Johnson said, dismissing Carlos' complaint. "Burned the morning rigging up some log sleds with the rope from our kits. They ain't pretty, but they'll hold for the job."

"We will have to make more," I said with a nod. "We are coming with you tomorrow. Even after buying the stables, we have plenty of caps left over."

"How did that happen?" Johnson asked skeptically. "You weren't very hopeful you'd be able to sell all that much."

"We sold what we brought, probably at half what we should have," I agreed, biting down my annoyance. "As we were leaving, Sheriff Simms handed us a small reward for clearing out Springvale. Speaking of which."

I stood and made my way to Maxwell, who was sitting with a group of other soldiers. I handed him the small piece of sheet metal. He accepted and looked down.

"Tuning frequencies for the radio?" He asked with a raised brow.

"That's right, should be able to contact Megaton through that," I explained. "Don't do it now, it's both too late and your break, but sometime tomorrow radio in and let them know ours."

"Of course, sir," He said, carefully sliding the piece of metal into his pocket. "I assume we are still obscuring the location of the HQ?"

"For now," I said with a nod. "I want another group of soldiers who can focus on defense before opening up our base. Preferably at least, who knows if I will get that chance."

"What about the trip to Rivet City?" Carlos asked, just a few steps away at our table.

"I plan on leaving at least four soldiers here," I revealed as I sat back down, poking at my dinner with my fork. "It's not much, but with the walls, I'm hoping they will be enough for any small-scale issue."

"You gonna have me stay being?" Johnson asked.

"No, I want you around in case I need to split up the group," I said, telling part of the truth. "I'm thinking about leaving Carlos or Joseph in charge."

Both of the named soldiers, my first two soldiers, stiffened slightly as I admitted I would be giving them the responsibility. They looked proud that I was trusting them, which was good.

"I was thinking of promoting you both, anyway," I admitted, leaning back in my chair. "You have both been with me the longest, and you deserve recognition for your hard work. I was thinking Corporals for both of you, that's the first step out of Private, right?"

"There are technically levels of Private, but something tells me you don't care about the details," Johnson said with a chuckle. "Corporal would work as good as any rank."

With that confirmation, I nodded before standing up. I took a breath and shouted to drown out the chatter.

"Alright, everyone, quiet for a moment," I said, waiting for everyone to settle before starting again. "It's been quite some time since I arrived here, stuck in a world I recognized, but no idea how to really navigate. I would like to think that we've made some incredible progress in that time."

I gestured for the two soldiers to stand, and they both did, standing at a rigid parade rest.

"Knowing this world might have helped, but there is no way I would have made it this far without my first two soldiers, Joseph and Carlos. Which is why, effective immediately, they are both receiving a promotion to Corporal."

Approving whispers filled the room for a moment, the majority of my soldiers nodding in agreement.

"Most likely, when I split up the squads into smaller chunks, they will be the ones leading them beside Johnson and me, though for now they will be remaining on my squad," I explained, looking around the room before focusing on Joseph and Carlos. "I might reorganize at some point, but that's for the future."

I gave them a close look, trying to decide whether to give them a salute or not. Eventually, I decided to play it safe, walking around and putting my hands on their shoulders.

"For now, know that they work directly under Johnson, and if we aren't around, they are who to go to for an answer," I said. "Congratulations, you two, you earned it."

We spread out a round of celebratory shots, tipping them back and cheering before we returned to our meals. Both of my soldiers looked proud and happy, and there was another layer of excitement running through the crowd. Johnson explained later that most of my soldiers had assumed they would just continue to be grunts, privates led by the hero units I got, or by officers I summoned, or however the system ended up working. Confirming that there was a chance that they would be promoted and gain the benefits such a promotion should bring was an exciting prospect for them.

By the time we finished eating, Joseph and Carlos had decided that the former would stay behind and guard the HQ. Their explanation was that Joseph's logical way of thinking was better suited for a stationary position than Carlos' flexible, out-of-the-box way. Carlos would be better suited for traveling with me. Joseph was honestly probably correct, and I filed that away for later consideration when I finally put together a defense team or needed a base leader of some kind.

That night, I fell asleep in moments, tired from the day of walking the wasteland. I was also eager to finally get our hands on some proper transportation, and I was excited by what that would open up for us. It was one of the larger barriers before we could start to perform some interesting missions, like raiding the [National Guard Depot](#) or several other targets.

Depending on the state of the Brotherhood of Steel, we could even head out to places normally owned by the [Outcasts](#), like [Fort Independence](#) or the bunker that started [Project Anchorage](#).

The following morning, I was up early, preparing my squad alongside Johnson's. When we were ready, we headed through to the Horizon world, a long day of work ahead of us. While all of us were doing our best to pull our weight and focus, I couldn't help but count down the minutes until our first mounts would be completed, which, according to Johnson, would be sometime after two o'clock. That was around the time they fed the first machines to the stable, which would take twenty-four hours to process.

With any luck, when they were done, we would have some machine help for the later runs.

