

By the time that Joseph and Carlos woke up and joined us outside in the main hall, Maxwell and I discovered two interesting things. First, the system interface computers could be pulled out of the wall to reveal a thick tablet, allowing Maxwell and I to sit down at one of the tables rather than huddling around the front desk. Unfortunately, a quick walk through the main hall had proven that they could not be removed from their designated building, so I couldn't just gather up all the tablets together into a single control hub.

At least, not without purchasing the rather expensive upgrade for the HQ called the "Command Center."

Our second discovery was that, while the new system had an extensive list of upgrades for each building, in this case, for the HQ, since that's the tablet we were looking at, the list of available buildings was much smaller. I could do everything from making the Headquarter's windows bulletproof to increasing the quality of the beds in the sleeping quarters and even upgrading the tablet interface itself.

The structures tab, on the other hand, which I gathered was unique to the HQ, only had a few dozen options. Sandbag barriers, roads, walls, rubble clearing, building deconstruction, and guard posts, all for a relatively low price, though from the images and descriptions, they were starting at pretty low quality. The wall looked more like stacked rubble and scrap, while anyone caught in the guard post was either brave or stupid, since it was built like it would collapse if you looked at it too hard.

Thankfully, these were marked as level ones, which meant they were likely upgradable. Unfortunately, the point remained that beyond these small "structures," there were only two other options. One was to build a duplicate medical facility, the other was a small area called a construction yard. It took me reading the description of the latter to realize that I had been stuck with an RTS-style tech tree. If I wanted to buy more essential buildings, things like the medbay, I would need to build the "infrastructure for it first. The basic construction yard only cost a hundred and fifty caps, but Maxwell was pretty certain that wouldn't unlock very much.

I would also need to clear the appropriate space for said building, but that was just about the cheapest thing on the menu, at least for small-scale clearing. Large piles of rubble, or even entire buildings, cost significantly more.

As Carlos and Joseph sat down, I filled them in on the change in situation while Maxwell went to get our breakfast.

"So... what exactly does this mean for our plans?" Carlos asked, leaning back in his chair, trying to grasp our new reality.

"Well, for one, it means that we can actually make plans now, instead of just crossing our fingers and praying," I explained. "No more waiting to get lucky and unlock what we were hoping for. If we want more people, then we can focus on hiring more soldiers. We have six more slots open in the barracks, and I intend to fill at least two more of those before we move on to focus on anything else."

"How much will that cost?"

"We haven't gone out to check," I admitted, my eyes flicking over to see Maxwell returning with our band MREs. "We can head out and check after breakfast."

We quickly ate our way through our breakfast before suiting up and heading out into the wasteland, making a beeline for the barracks. After a quick look inside, I spotted the control terminal, and after a bit of fiddling, managed to pull it off in its tablet form. I sat down along one of the beds and started going through it.

"Okay, so it looks like new soldiers are two hundred caps," I said with a wince. "A combat medic is three hundred. So, not cheap."

"We obviously can't afford that," Joseph pointed out. "We have, what, fifty caps? Forty?"

"Somewhere around that," I agree with a nod, still looking down at the tablet. "That means our real next step is to prepare for our merchant friend to return."

"We could go directly to Megaton on our own," Carlos pointed out. "It should be relatively safe, especially since we cleared out the Super mart."

"...Adam Farli should be by in a few days," I said after a long pause, looking up at the ceiling as I considered our options. "We spend that time gathering anything worth grabbing, especially medical junk. Then, when he arrives, we sell what we can and use the profits to purchase as many soldiers as possible. Then we rinse and repeat, this time traveling to Megaton. We sell what we can, come back and readjust depending on our profits."

As I talked, both Joseph and Carlos nodded along, taking seats around the simple barracks. When I was done, Joseph leaned forward.

"So, what is our goal past that?" Joseph asked. "Making money for more soldiers is a good plan, don't get me wrong. But what's the step after that?"

"I don't quite know," I admitted, tapping the control tablet, and putting it down on the bed beside me. "Without the construction yard, I can't see what our options are, which is why I said we would come back and readjust depending on how much money we made. That said..."

I trailed off, mentally adjusting myself. This was now a lot more about what I wanted, now that I was in control. I needed to think ahead, much further than just the immediate plan.

"I think something we should be focusing on is safe transportation," I finally said. "Depending on how much we diversify, there is only so much money we can make per trip to Megaton or a visit from a trader. Not only that, but I'm also worried that constantly taking people's caps and essentially burning them to invest in the system might force people back to trading and bartering from a lack of physical cash. The more places we have to trade with, the more spread out that impact will be."

"Having a way to transfer people and goods between HQ and our trade partners would mean more money per trip, assuming they could keep up," Joseph pointed out. "Not to mention it will make scavenging more profitable. Transport is a good call, Sir."

"I'm glad you agree," I said with a nod. "Today, we are going to head back to the Super-Duper Mart. There was a *ton* of medical junk and trash in the pharmacy there, all of which could be good fodder for the medical facility. After that, over the next few days, we spiral around the HQ, clearing what we can. During that time, we need to keep our eyes open for any location that might be useful. Anything from a dentist to a chiropractor's office would have stuff to feed medbay."

After a bit more talking and planning, we started making our way back to the HQ. On the way there, we stopped at the medical facility to see how things had gone overnight. A total of three RadAway units were stacked along one cabinet, with a fourth about thirty percent completed. I used the remaining resources still inside the system to finish radiation treatment before creating a fifth one, which almost depleted the resources completely. I then switched the generation over to Rad-X before we made our way out of the small building.

"I'm hoping that with all the resources we gain today, plus all the older stuff we have stored inside, we can make a few units of Rad-X, some Med-X, and some Stimpaks," I explained as we crossed from the medbay to the HQ. "Then we can set it to start producing stuff to sell. I think we should start by creating some of the larger trauma kits, and then we can switch to things like antibiotics and other necessary supplies."

"Not selling any stimpaks?" Joseph asked as we stepped into the HQ.

"I have no doubt that the stimpaks are worth a good chunk of change, but I have a feeling the system is making them take longer to print because they are just so useful in combat," I said, chewing my cheek. "The Emissary warned me directly that the system isn't one-to-one in terms of value versus effort or cost. We might be able to get thirty, forty, maybe even fifty caps for a new stimpak. But a pile of antibiotics? Sterile, clean tools? They will take a fraction of the time and resources to make, but likely sell for more in the end. If not, then we can switch our strategy up for our trip to Megaton."

I explained to Maxwell what the plan was before we made our way to our living quarters and fully armed up. As we left, Maxwell waved goodbye, already starting to move what we were keeping from our most recent hauls downstairs into the storage room. The upgrades to connect the secured storage and the storage of other buildings were affordable enough that I planned on installing them in most buildings. It would allow us to retrieve supplies from the secure storage all over the growing base, a handy convenience that was worth more than a few hundred caps.

The walk to the Super-Duper Mart was tense, but not as much as the first time, since it was likely that the large building was still clear from before. As we finally approached, we slowed down, scanning the area to confirm there weren't any new tenants. Soon we were walking through the aisles, making our way back to the pharmacy. As we approached, Carlos

peeled off to try to locate any aisles that might contain medical supplies and junk, such as over-the-counter medications or bandages.

Within twenty minutes, Joseph and I had stuffed our packs and two duffel bags full of a wide variety of items that were arguably trash. We had containers of moldy pills, boxes of rotted medical magazines, and anything else we felt was even remotely connected to medicine or medical practices. There was very little doubt that some of it would likely not count towards the system resources, but it was better to know now during a relatively easy salvage run than have to drag something through a much more difficult journey, only to find out it was useless.

When Joseph and I were done, our bags bulging with junk, we looked around for Carlos, finding him just finishing up as well. He had managed to find what he was looking for, with similar results to ours.

The walk back was boring, but with the sun shining through light clouds, and our inherent daytime buff, we made good time getting back to the Headquarters. As we returned, we headed directly for the medbay, where I fed the system just enough to create a medical notepad and a pen. I used that notepad, which had plenty of blank space for notes, to record whatever junk the system didn't consider as medical materials. This would hopefully prevent us from hauling around useless junk in the future, like the completely ruined medical magazines.

After we were done slowly feeding the medbay resources, I quickly printed out three Rad-X containers, replacing the old prewar ones we each carried. We each dropped the old bottles down the chute before making two more for storage. We then fed the system the rest of the old Prewar crap we had been collecting, including all of our old stimpacks and other drugs.

When we were done trading supplies back and forth, we had a solid buffer of new, shiny medical materials. This included a handful of stimpak, as well as two complete trauma kits, some antibiotics, and other supplies. At this point, barring maybe the Brotherhood, we likely had the best stocked medbay in the Capital Wasteland.

"Alright. I think that is more than enough for our personal supplies," I said, looking at the sum of our total medical materials, all of it fitting snugly in two large metal cabinets. "Let's get this all moved into the secure storage. This building isn't nearly secure enough for this. I'll buy the supply link when we have some caps to spend."

Four trips later, the medbay was mostly empty, and our secure storage had another few shelves filled with supplies. After that, we took a break, as we had a few long days ahead of us.

When our break was over, my soldiers and I left the Headquarters and headed out past the half-collapsed building right next to the HQ. That afternoon, we finally finished clearing the small strip mall to the east, tearing off boarded doors and windows to do so. Inside were a few different shops, as well as an infestation of rad roaches and a handful of ghouls.

Any supplies or materials we found were hauled back and stored, though in all honesty, there wasn't much.

The following day, we started working around in a circle, heading south, clearing buildings as we went, making good progress, and finding a decent amount of loot. Our primary focus was anything even remotely connected to medicine or medical care, but we also found plenty of booze, some ammo, a few weapons, including a few weapons inside safes that looked brand new.

On the third day, we found a small corner store that was mostly burned out, but it still held a whole aisle of over-the-counter ointments, bottles, and other supplies. They had long since dried up and molded over, but were still acceptable as "components" for the medbay. We also found a floor safe in an office that held a near-pristine [laser pistol](#), which Joseph eagerly claimed, retiring his unused silenced 10mm. I had never seen the soldier that happy, and watching him examine and smile at the weapon every time we took a break never failed to get Carlos on his case.

"Should we give you two the room?" he joked, dodging a tin can that the energy weapon nut threw at him, all while still laughing. "You two can share the barracks, just remember to use protection! I'm too young to be an uncle!"

Switching from the smaller mall stores to the much larger buildings meant our progress in clearing the area slowed considerably, as by the fourth day, we had only cleared three more buildings. Our ammo and equipment had been refreshed the day before, which was good, as two of the buildings, sealed up from rubble, had contained a small horde of ghouls, which drained a lot of our ammo.

If we hadn't used the trick of assigning a Soldier's Kit to Maxwell, I would have been considerably more worried about it.

By the fifth day, we had accumulated a decent amount of newly created medical supplies, ready to be traded for caps. We also had boxes of assorted ammo, crates of old, dusty alcohol, office supplies, and crates full of stuff that someone might be interested in buying, all of it tucked into the corner of the main hall, stacked on the shelves and boxes Joseph and I had dragged inside. All of the medical supplies intended for trade were also stacked there, ready to be inspected and hopefully sold.

We were about to leave on another run, heading out to a new, boarded-up building to clear, when Joseph happened to look out the window.

"Sir, looks like our merchant friend, Mr. Farli has arrived," He said. "Looks like they set up in one of the cleared buildings to the west."

I walked over to the window, and sure enough, the merchant was directing his people, shifting around rubble and moving the cows into the building. It looked like he was making himself comfortable.

"Alright, let's go out and say hello," I said, clipping my helmet to my hip. "Let's keep the loadout light, try and keep the tension to a minimum."

My soldiers nodded, and after a quick check of our kit, we headed out of the HQ, leaving our rifles just inside the entrance.