Chapter 19 Not Everyone Likes Small Villages

The air mage circled twice more before landing. He had a messy white beard and hair. He smiled on landing looking at the assortment of townsfolk that had come out to greet his entrance. He looked directly at me, “Lord? You seem to be in charge here. Is there a good inn where I can wet my whistle? I just flew in and my arms are tired!” The people around me looked at each other confused. I wasn’t sure if we had a good natured mage on our hands or a wise ass.

I checked the short dossier on the mage from the NPC auction house.

*Manto Lanier, Master Air Mage, Human Age 70*

*Temperament: Sanguine*

*Skills: Master Air Magic, Master Air:Lightning, Master Spirit: Life*

I remembered why I had recruited him. I had wanted someone to teach me air magic and spirit magic. “Manto! Thank you for coming! We have built you a residence by the river. If you will come with me we can discuss compensation for your services.” He nodded with a smile and we walked away from the center of the village.

“Lord I must confess I am looking for a quite place to settle and live out my waning years. For my service to you as a lord I was hoping to just operate a clinic in town. I know my skill as an air mage is probably why you have recruited me to your quaint little town but my days of adventuring and battle have past me by.” I absorbed his confession and thought how to turn it.

“Manto that can be arranged. We have built you a tower to reside in and as lord I would expect you to spend your daily allotment of service time to healing the sick and injured and imparting knowledge to those who come to you seeking it.” I hoped I had hit a homerun with my statement but Manto seemed contemplative.

“Truthfully Lord you town…lacks many amenities I am accustomed to. I will stay here for one month and if you can meet my needs I will sign on with for long term.”

*New Quest Offered: Provide the Town Services Manto Requires*

*Have the following structures operating within 30 days in Malcum: Tavern, Barber, Bakery, Fine Tailor*

*Reward: Manto will sign a long term contract, 1,200 experience*

I hadn’t been offered a quest in a while so this was good in that respect. I checked and the Inn would qualify as a tavern if it served alcohol. A bakery was going to be easy enough…it took just a few clicks on my town interface to designate a building as the bakery. Barber? I checked the description and requirements. The barber required someone with the barber skill at 7 or higher operating his business in the town. Fuck, I had used all my NPC bidding slots. The finer tailor was the same deal but the tailor needed a skill of 23 or higher. I could do nothing but agree.

I paid Manto his monthly wage of 2 gold coins up front. He liked the stone tower we had built for him. It didn’t have any furniture but he said he was more than capable of obtaining his own. I then spent the next few hours with him learning five new skills.

*Air Magic 1 Tier 1 Unlocked, +1 Channeling, +2% air magic spells*

*Air Magic: Force 1 Tier 1 Unlocked, +1 Str, +2% Air Force Spells*

*Air Magic: Lightning 1 Tier 1 Unlocked, +1 Spd, +2% Air Lightning Spells*

*Spirit Magic 1 Tier 1 Unlocked, +1 Con, +2% Spirit Spells*

*Spirit Magic: Life 1 Tier 1 Unlocked, +1 Mag, +2% Spirit Life Spells*

Reading didn’t count toward my skill total of 23 but these new skills put me at 25 active skills, giving me a penalty of 2% slower learning speed for all skills. I was happy to get a skill to enhance my speed attribute. Manto was too tired to teach my spells today but promised to do so tomorrow. He was going to teach me Force Shield, a tier 1 force spell and Restore Health, a tier 1 life mage spell. Once I raised my air and spirit magic to level 7 he would be able to teach me tier 5 spells.

It was dark when I left Manto in his tower to return home. I found a cold plate of shepherd’s pie on the table. I ate it quickly and bounded up the stairs. Jaesmin was sleeping in her thin sexy pullover nightgown. I was about to probe her awake when I noticed Simba on a shelf watching me. He said, “We need to talk.”

I followed the small feline downstairs. He hopped up on the table and began. “The developers have given me the task of letting you know the players in the real world are upset that hard wired players get to keep their progress on games launch. The compromise that they reached with the players purchasing the game is all hard wired players will be reset to level 1. Hard wired players will keep their skills at their current level. However you will not be able to advance in levels of skill levels for the first 30 days of the games release.” Simba’s tail was twitching. This was bad news but not terrible news.

“What about our game and quest progress?” I asked the small cat.

“There will be no reboot of the system. Since most quests are AI generated and the world is in constant evolution it was decided not to reset the entire game. We are currently on day 85 of the game testing phase. On day 180 the game will launch with early release players. There will be 1,229 hardwired players continuing their game play. Another 50,000 players will join the game. These players have paid a substantial sum of money for a 30 ‘game’ day head start. That will equal a one-week head start in the real world once you account for the game day cycle. After this seven day period there are 28 million players who have already purchased the game who will be joining. This number is also likely to grow to upwards of 50 million.” Simba finished but I could tell he wasn’t finished with information but I was excited. Although the game NPCs seemed real to me I was looking forward to interacting with other people again.

“What else is there Simba?” The cat was hesitating. I didn’t know why.

“One of the updates that has been highly debated was whether or not to allow players to procreate in the game. It was deemed too difficult psychologically for a person to deal with having a child that didn’t really exist. The update was scratched for players…but that edit never occurred for hardwired players…it was an oversight by the programmers and the conditions for conceiving a child were pretty strenuous. Somehow you managed to get your companion Jaesmin to meet these conditions. So Congratulations! You are going to be a father!…or the developers could get the programmers to correct this…”

Simba stopped communicating. He was waiting for me to respond. “How long do I have to decide? Would the child be immortal? I mean this is a terribly violent place and I don’t think I could deal with losing a child in here.” Simba spaced out, probably getting answers.

“Your developer contact said player offspring could be killed in game but respawn at the nearest temple after one game day. They count as a companion but do not occupy a companion slot. They age 5 times quicker in game and at age 15 they can begin to acquire skills and level. Their respawn time at this point then follows normal companion respawn rules.” Simba finished then after a pause continued, “Do you have an answer?”

“No. I need time to think on it.” I replied. I went to my drafting table to distract myself. Simba jumped up on the table to interrupt me.

“Children in game are born after 90 game days. The developer wants a decision in ten days from you. If you do not decide the child will be removed from the code.” Simba left before I could respond to what sounded like an ultimatum from the people who controlled every aspect of my life.

I put a lot of focus into my drafting work and got inspired. Halfway through the night I switched over to drafting an alchemy shop. It looked fantastic on paper and I was rewarded with a prompt.

*Very Rare Alchemy Shop, Health 50,000, Requires Masonry Foundations 23, Masonry: Structures 23, Woodcraft: Carpentry 23 (Skill Crafting Bonus to Alchemy: +10% to potion crafting speed and potency)*

My inspirational focus faded after I completed the plans. The crafting bonus was something I hadn’t seen before. The Alchemy shop wasn’t large in its footprint but had a basement for storage, a storefront on the first floor, a workshop on the second floor and the third floor was an apartment. The first two floor were stone on the plans with the third floor being wood. Jaesmin came down the stairs all smiles. That look on her face…it made the decision for me. She may only be code in a game but it was more to me. A child would make her happy. A gave her a hug and told her I was getting breakfast at the general store this morning.

It didn’t take me long to find Simba and tell him of my decision to keep the child. Simba disappeared and I was worried he may have been taken from me permanently. I found Sanso at the general store sharing breakfast with Elice. I told Sanso to hold off on completing the enchanter’s tower. I wanted to redraw the plans to try to increase the building quality. We would be working on the alchemy shop today in town.

Sanso reviewed the plans and even his untrained eye could see they were special. As long as I was there to serve as the foreman the alchemy shop would be the nicest building in town. I drank some fruit juice for breakfast with buttered toast and we met with Jaesmin at the site for the alchemy shop. It was going to be centrally located in the town. Sanso called over all his elementals and in just a few hours the basement was done with connections to the budding sewer system.

We worked well together and by the end of the day all the stonework was completed for the first and second floor. We still needed lumber, lots of lumbar. Manto approached as we were packing up for the day. “Lord Tallis I was watching you work from atop my tower and that was some amazing work today. Do you have time to learn the spells I mentioned yesterday? You already paid me the funds and I would like to discharge my duties before turning in.” He was genuine in his speech and I kind of liked the old man. Learning the spells only took a short amount of time.

*Force Shield 1, Air: Force Tier 1, Casting Time: 1 second, Magic 20, Create 1 meter shield with 200 health*

*Restore Health 1, Spirit: Life Tier 1, Casting Time: 3 seconds, Magic 25, Heal 100 Health instantly on touch*

I decided to ask him a question after reviewing the spells, “Manto if I harvested some trees directly across the river from your tower could you protect me from the creatures within?” He studied me for a moment before replying.

“I could Lord. Would it be just you?” He asked.

“It would be just me but I would have a few men on the town bank ready to pull the felled logs across.” He nodded in thought. Then affirmed that he could protect me but wouldn’t travel into the woods, just remain atop his tower.

It was a plan to get much needed wood. We had a trade contract with the town 15 miles south along the river, Barrista, but that was one shipment a month. I needed to get our lumber mill operating now. Galana should be back with the trade caravan in a day or two and our second giantkin ranged specialist was due to arrive in three days. Both of them would be great support but right now I had an experienced lightning mage to back me up. I planned to cut just four trees on the far bank tomorrow.

That evening I ate dinner with Jaesmin and we lunged on couch entwined. I practiced my force shield spell while she talked about the happenings in the town. She we had sex she had gained a lot of confidence in interacting with the townspeople again. As it got late I told Jaesmin I needed to work on the Enchanter’s tower tonight. I was hoping for some inspiration. She pouted a little but left me to the toils at the drafting table.

At first I tried to copy the alchemy concepts to the existing stone tower draft but it failed. It seemed there was a game block…or maybe a mental from transferring the effectiveness of the blue prints. I started from scratch. The enchanter tower would be larger and have three sub basements. The first floor would be an elaborate shop with a specialized enchanting room in the back. The second floor would be a large apartment. The third floor would be a specialized enchanting room and the roof would be a personal garden for the enchanter. I redid the plans twice and they finally felt right.

*Rare Enchanter’s Tower, Health 35,000, Requires Masonry Foundations 23, Masonry: Structures 23 (Skill Bonus to Enchanting: Reduce Time by 10%)*

Not a fantastic bonus but still a specific skill bonus. It was over 90% stone in the draft which should make it feasible to build. The morning came and I went to meet Sanso before Jaesmin even woke. I brought Sanso to the river and he built a narrow bridge across the river which spanned 20 yards at the narrow point or the river. Sanso didn’t seem overly concerned about the forest and came across with me and we talked as I felled my first tree with my battle axe. As I was cutting the branches off a boar the size of a small horse came barreling out of the woods. Sanso just pointed at it and the earth swallowed it. He said his elementals were patrolling underground while I worked. Well, that was just bad ass and made me feel pretty secure.

I felled six trees in succession, all at least four feet in diameter, and waved to Manto in the tower letting him know I was done. I got the logs into water and soon townsfolk hauled them across and up to the mill. The good thing about the game mechanics is everything went smoothly with crafting. It didn’t take as much time as in the real world and also the product was always usable but the quality varied. Sanso and I were attacked crossing the narrow stone bridge on our return. A flurry of arrows came out of the dark woods.

I spied a single shape and identified it.

*Darkskull Goblin Scout, ???,???,???*

We retreated and the goblins in the woods did not emerge. We did have a problem as a quest appeared for me.

*New Quest: Eliminate the threat of the Darkskull Goblin Tribe in Shiverwood forest. Reward: Logging Outpost, 10,000 Experience*

 At least I knew what the threat would be from the forest. With the amount of lumber harvested we could finish the inn, alchemy shop, the enchanter’s tower and have some left over for furniture. I was offered the lumberjack skill and after some research took it. The skill gave me the knowledge of which trees to select and the specific tree type. It could led to an improvement in the quality of the lumber and then the structures the wood was built from. This meant my skill advancement was now slowed by 3%. The associated stat for lumberjack was stamina.

Later in the day I was working with Jaesmin on the upper floors of the alchemy shop when Simba returned. He spoke first.

“Tallis I have good news. Your fatherhood in the game is going to be a test case. The programmers have locked down the mechanisms so no one else can achieve offspring. They also made some adjustments to companions. Some of the players were abusing their companions...” he didn’t go into specifics. “Now AI companions can only be animal in nature.” Simba looked tired and curled up.

As we worked, Simba slept and dinner approached. A modest cart with five people came into town. I climbed down to meet them with the other townsfolk. My shipwright had arrived…and we had no lumber as I had allocated everything I cut this morning. I escorted him with Jaesmin to the house we prepared and while his exhausted family unloaded we went to the river and talked about boats.

The river flow was such that down river travel would be quick. To return upriver the boats would need either water magic or air magic enchantments. This was a bit disappointing but my other option was crewing the river trade ships with enough crew to sail or row them. We just didn’t have the bodies to do so. Fortunately, my new shipwright, Laeron, had plans for a simple river boat. He even had the water glide enchantment diagram in his papers. Things were looking up.

After getting them settled I went home and found Jaesmin cooking. I came up behind her and wrapped her in my arms and started kissing her neck. It didn’t take long to forget about dinner and head to the bedroom.

*Finish the Inn*

* *Build a house for the giantkin next to Galana’s*
* *Design and build an enchanter’s shop*
* *Train up Jaesmin*

*Ivory Ring of Deep Magic, +8 Magic, +2% total magic pool increase*

*Steel Ring of Fire Resistance, 30 Armor vs. Fire*

*Black and White Leather Belt of Channeling, +15 channeling*

*Blue Dragon Hide Belt, +50% damage with lightning spells*

*Cherry Wand of Fire, +25% damage with fire*

*Black Oak Wand of Focus, 10% magic reduction for all spells*

*Kahn’s Black Dragon Leather Saddle, +6 Riding Skill, +20% speed of mount, +20% damage with melee weapons, 50% less stamina drain on mount*

Earth elementals….

*Meld Wood Nature: Plant Tier 1, Magic Cost: 25, Effect: Integrate two pieces of wood that are in contact with each other, Casting Time: 10 seconds*

*Destroying gear*

*Entrance to Crypt of the Phoenix King, Level 20, Floors 5, \*Scaling Dungeon\**

*Masonry 1 Tier 1 unlocked, +1 Strength, +2% health to structures*