Chapter 41

The trader had returned to Malcum. I looked around at the people searching his wares and saw Zion with a grin on his face as he inspected a small flock of mismatched sheep. I decided I needed to handle this first so I approached Zion. He spoke first, “Lord Tallis quite the little flock you have here. Think you will be competing with me on the markets for goat cheese and wool?” He was all smiles and it was clear he was aware that I had doubled up on his quest.

Best not to make it too easy for him to get the sheep, “Master Zion I do in fact plan to start my own wool and goat cheese business. I used your quest as a baseline to figure out what varieties I needed to start with.” I was beaming a small and the dwarf barber grin was fading. “But perhaps you would be interested in buying out your competition before it starts?” I offered with a smile on my face.

It took Zion just a few seconds before he nodded and his smile returned, “Aye Lord Tallis. I will offer you a fair price for these fine animals. Let's say 30% of the wool from all my stock for the next year.” He looked expectantly at me for an answer.

Well, I knew he sold meat, wool, and cheese from his sheep so I was only getting 30% of one-third of his products. But I needed to factor the sheep I had here would only expand his flocks by 20%...so doing the math. Ugh, fuck the math. “Agreed master Zion if you will give me a haircut free of charge when requested.” He nodded and we shook on it. Zion was beaming the entire time at his fortune.

I moved to the trader and waited for him to finish with the townsfolk. I checked out his goods and it was a lot of non-magical household items. It appeared he was doing well though as the tables were slowly being emptied. When it slowed down he turned to me, “Lord I see you have taken care of your sheep. I have the other item you requested as well but it was a few more coins than expected.” He went to his wagon and pulled out a scroll and handed it to me.

The scroll wasn’t very fancy and I unfurled it.

*Common Small Auction House Plans, 5000 Health, Requirements Woodcraft Carpentry 7, Portal Stone, Range 1,000 miles*

The building was fairly simple in design. I was 40’ by 40’ and had two dozen alcoves inside which I assumed were terminals for players to access the auction houses within 1,000.

“The plans were hard to find since only players can utilize them,” The trader interrupted me. “I had extra expenses and had to call in a favor from a friend.

“And how much will your extra effort cost me?” I asked while still perusing the plans.

“25 gold,” he said without hesitation. I nodded and produced the coin. The plans had some building materials that assumed were magic based. It required 24 tier 1 dimensional essence and 24 tier 1 space essence. I could task Mad Dog with getting the material. I planned to make the structure out of stone instead of wood. My internal building sense told me that wouldn’t change the functionality of the building, just it's base Health Points.

Being such a simple structure I went to the town portal and planned to put it next to the Guard House. I dropped one summoned stone slab and jumped when a voice barked, “What are you doing?” I turned to see Breda, my city planner. The dwarf woman did not look happy.

“Lord Tallis you can't just go throwing buildings up willy-nilly. I have been working on a plan for the city that requires minimal building relocations and street adjustments. Come with me.” She said in a softer voice. It didn’t sound like a request so I followed.

We went to her office and over half the room was the large table laid out with miniature buildings that had labels on them. I picked one up, *General Store*, and was marveling at the detail. I didn’t notice the dwarf’s hard stare and put the piece back down. The look gave me the feeling that I was playing with her dollhouse furniture without permission.

“Now Lord Tallis you can see I have created districts within the city. I did my best to keep buildings where they are currently located but these and these will need to be moved here.” She use a pointer stick to indicate the buildings and spots. I noticed something, “What is this district?” I pointed to the shoreline where my house and the inn were located.

“This will be the upper-class district. When we expand the footprint of Malcum it will include both sides of the river. We will build the small estates and luxury housing along the banks,” she said as if the matter was already decided.

“What about the docks and the shipwright?” I asked, seeing those structures on her model.

“We will be moving them downriver, just outside the walls. Most industry will be moved west outside the earthwork walls. When the city is large enough to build a second wall we will encompass them in that structure. But for now, the only industry allowed within the city will be the industry with low noise pollution and material waste.” She seemed confident in her speech.

I was slightly confused. This was a video game…what was with material waste and pollution? I was afraid to look at the game updates. I did anyway. Oh shit! Literally. The need for sewers was less than 40 hours away. Breda was still talking but I was looking at her model. Yes everything she had planned made a lot of sense but it was going to slow down the town’s development.

“So moving all these buildings?” I asked leaving the question open for an answer.

“I talked with Sanso. Powerful mage that one. And he thinks he can relocate three buildings a day,” Breda supplied. I did the math for the 27 buildings she wanted to be moved…so I would be without Sanso for nine days! I paled in comparison to Sanso when it came to generating stone and manipulating it for building. He was worth five of me easily. Losing him for nine days? Nope.

“I can't spare Sanso for that long. You can direct him every third day. It means your changes will take a month but they will happen.” I tried to sound all lordly and it seemed to work as she nodded. Maybe I would spend every third day off trying to gain some levels? If I got to level 25 I could get myself a class. I know I should be trying to level before I got locked out of leveling by the game's launch but there was so much to do around town.

“That is doable. So you have new building plans, an auction house? You should place it here.” She indicated a spot just twenty feet from where I had started my construction. “If you look,” she said patiently, “by placing it here it won't obstruct the roads and will be close to the road that will contain the player's guild houses.”

She pulled out some blocks simply labeled guild house. “These are plots you can sell to players so they can build buildings to house their populations. Each plot is 250’ by 250’. I think a reasonable price for each plot is 2,000 gold and a monthly rent of 200 gold.” My jaw dropped and Breda smirked. “The players are what will fund your city Lord Tallis. Have you looked at your balance sheet recently?” Panicked I opened it and was shocked to see I only had enough funds for three more weeks of operations...but that didn’t include the arrival of the garrison for my barracks!

My heart was thudding as I looked at all my new expenses. The master NPCs were killing me financially. Whose idea was it to get so many so early in the town’s development? It was only DAY 112. The game launch was DAY 181. And even after the game launch, I would have to wait for players to accumulate enough wealth to build guild houses! So even with Breda’s projections, this wealth wouldn’t be available for some time. I needed to start making serious money!

Seeing my panic Breda spoke, “Lord Tallis there is no need to fret. As long as we solidify Malcum’s economy and begin steady exports things will be fine. Look here.” She handed me a sheet. It listed a number of items made in Malcum. “All you need to do is establish trade for the surplus of these items and you should be able to generate a handsome monthly profit.” She seemed smug but I was thankful to have the list in my hand. I went to my interface and it copied her worksheet there.

“Ok, Breda so my biggest concern right now is the shit hitting the fan in two days.” I said with attempted humor but Breda didn’t get the joke. “The sewers Breda, they become functional in two days. She smiled at the joke, a little late but oh well.

“Lord Tallis that is one thing you are well ahead of the game on. The sluice purification back to the river is complete according to Persephone and I gave her two locations within the city to add two more in the future. Sanso has my new network of sewer and water lines for the entire city and his golems are going to be working on them.” She smiled confidently. It did look like she was worth the money.

We talked for another hour and by the end of our conversation, Breda was no longer talking down to me but to me as we hashed out the order of building plans. The priority was to increase housing and industry so our exports could increase the treasury. The second priority was changing the earthen wall around the town to a stone wall. The third and final priority was increasing the aesthetic beauty of Malcum. I felt the weight come off my shoulders as Breda was going to be the guiding hand of the town’s development and make sure we didn’t make costly errors…well costly errors going forward.

I walked down to the general store and was intrigued as Savanah was outside the alchemist yelling about the wares offered inside. I approached the girl and she had a huge smile on her face, “Lord Tallis come inside and buy some revitalizing cream and hair growth salve! I brewed them myself!” She was still in complete control of her body and I followed her inside.

Tonna was talking to a villager and Savannah dragged me over to another counter and put two small tubes on the counter. “This one is the hair growth. Since you are not bald yet you can use it to grow a beard.” Not to dissuade the girl from her new profession I applied the salve and took a mirror. A healthy beard grew from my face. But it was off-red in color so didn’t match my black hair.

Savanah was still all smiles, so I said, “You are going to be a mighty alchemist one day girl! Do you have something in black?” I asked.

She didn’t understand the question at first, “Oh to match your hair? No, but I do have a red dye to match your new beard!” She placed another vial on the counter.

“Hmm, I think I like the contrast.” Not really but why burst the girl’s bubble. I escaped the shop shortly after before I found myself trying all of her brewing concoctions. The little whelp even charged her lord 2 silver for the two potions! A future alchemist and trader!

I found Sanso and he did not look happy. Breda had twenty-eight pages of notes for him of things to work on. It was a lot different than working for me. I gave him the good news that he only had to work with Breda one out of three days. On the other days, he would work with me and the two new construction workers. I sat with Sanso and the builders and found many of Breda's notes could be handled by our new workers so we divided up the tasks, much to the relief of Sanso.

We were all going to head toward the lumber mill north of town when my notification pinged.

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

The experience was extremely welcome but more importantly, I could now harvest lumber safely on the other side of the river. I checked my notifications and Mad Dog had in fact let me know they just defeated the goblin chief and they were returning to celebrate! I sent him a message that I was putting together a shopping list for him in the city.

Instead of working on buildings at the lumber mill, we all worked on building a large and wide stone bridge across the river. Even though I didn’t see many ships going upriver I still gave it ample clearance underneath. The bridge spanned the entire 60 yards in one long arch and looked impressive. Tomorrow we would widen it so a wagon could easily cross. I would also take down the narrow bridge by Manto’s tower. I got a message from Mad Dog and read it aloud to my crew.

*The new ale is fantastic mate! Where the fuck are ya?*

That was all they needed to hear and we headed to the inn in town to sample our newest town commodity.

There was a big celebration in full swing and the inn was packed with over 150 people. I noticed many children also present and we had a semi-band going. The person who was by far having the best time though was Fareth. She was coming out from the kitchens every five minutes with large trays filled with food. The ale was also flowing heavily. My fellow builders moved into the crowd to join their families and get food. I noticed Jaesmin sitting with Manto and moved to sit with them.

As I set a mug was placed in my hand and I sipped it. Wow, it was good! It was slightly nutty in the aroma but cold and went down smoothly. Manto raised his own mug and spoke, “The enchanter made some cold barrels for the ale at my suggestion of course.” He sipped again. “So Lord Tallis you have a good thing going here,” he sighed. “But the more successful you are the more people want to take it. I have friends in human lands to the south. When your success reaches their ears they will send someone to claim your little village and collect taxes from you.” He sipped again as I digested the info. So I not only had to worry about players I also had to worry about NPC cities?

“How long do I have until they come? Can we stop them?” I asked for advice from the powerful mage.

“Oh, you have time. How much I do not know. But they will come with the tax collector first. They will say something like, ‘these lands have belonged to us for a hundred years and we have come to collect our rightful due for protecting the lands from great evils.’” He sipped again. “This is really good ale. Well, you can pay the man, and they will return and ask for more taxes in a year or you can tell them to fuck off.” He sipped again.

“If you tell them to fuck off he will run back to the court and it will take them a few months to send either a diplomatic party or a small military force to subdue your little town. I think you will be strong enough by then to tell them to get lost.” He raised his mug again and seemed peeved it was empty. “So that is the advice of a drunk has been war wizard. Take it as you will.” Manto stood a little shakily and went to the bar for another mug and sat with Manarag’s family at a table.

“He has been teaching Manarag’s eldest some air magic,” Jaesmin said. A long pause occurred. “So what are you going to do?” She asked. I looked around the room at all the diverse races getting along so well. I had built this from next to nothing and it was just the beginning.

“Oh, we are not going to let anyone take this away from us. All will be welcome here and we will be strong in the face of any adversity.” I said it with conviction. In the back of my head, I knew it was going to be a battle to keep the idyllic existence we had created. Whether it was the human NPC courts or the influx of players we were going to fight to keep our independence.