

Chapter 54

I relaxed on the tower now that I had secured all my NPCs. Bella came rushing up the stairs, grasping the platinum coins with a vice grip. I was actually surprised Elice had given her the coins so freely. I would definitely need to build a vault under my manor. At least I had the elite palace guards to spawn and protect my funds.

“Thank you, Bella!” I took the coins. “Manto, how long do you require my presence? I want to go motivate other townsfolk.” Manto’s indirect revelation that my presence greatly benefited the townsfolk made me even more suspect of the mage. He was so outside the NPC norms I thought he might be a developer or administrator in disguise. But it didn’t make sense that they would help me, and all my other NPCs seemed certain Manto was one of them.

“Just another hour or so, Lord Tallis. Then you can go and meet the new arrivals. Bella here is very close to her first spell, *thunderclap*.” He smiled at me, and I sat down and relaxed. I needed a break from drafting anyway. I went to my interface and began to set up for the new arrivals.

A deafening wave hit me and knocked me over a half hour later. My ears were ringing, and I was deaf. Manto had a massive grin on his face and was rubbing the joyous bunny’s head. “A little warning would have been nice,” I said. Manto said something that I couldn’t hear, and I just shook my head and left. The deafened debuff had a 40-second counter.

I made my way to the portal stone as my hearing returned. I had two primary groups here to meet the incoming arrivals. The traders and caravanners would be going with Kytalia and Elice. Setting up trade routes was going to be a huge boost for Malcum. Resupply trips to the orc outpost would help the outpost grow quickly.

The caravan guards would go with Galana and Mira to settle into their prepared accommodations.

The master paper makers and master furniture crafters would go with our elf lumberjack and get tours of the facilities before settling with help from the townsfolk.

The two miners were going with Sanso. They were going to the copper mines below his tower and would be moving into Sanso’s tower with their families. Sanso would renovate the tower by the river in town, and Elice was moving in with him. The demonkin scribe was going to meet with Garn Steelhand, the bookshop owner and curator for our nonexistent library. I was interested to see exactly what her skills could do for us.

The centaur animal trainer was to be relocated to the orc outpost to train horses. I hoped that he was fit for the task. And finally, the foxkin enchanter was mine. I needed to make sure he stayed in Malcum.

It was the demonkin who arrived first. She was tall and thin with dark skin and stout horns. She looked a little frightened on her arrival, and thankfully, Mira was here to talk with her briefly and

introduce her to Garn. The dwarf was all smiles. She seemed hesitant but did leave with Garn, who was talking with his hands. A lizardman appeared next with four young ones. Elice moved in... The arrivals continued for half an hour as I waited for my foxkin to arrive. I didn't see any problems other than one of the female caravan guards was carrying a small boy when she arrived, and she started to defend herself from the crowd of people, protecting her son. It took 10 minutes to get sorted, and I was worried that NPC might not fit into Malcum if she had a prejudice against non-humans.

The next to last to arrive was my foxkin. And oh boy, did he arrive. He had a wife and ten kids! Maybe eleven, as it was too hard to count, as they immediately began running around. Bella squealed as one of the small foxkin raced up her leg. This was a very lively arrival. As we were helping the two hapless foxkin parents round up their kids, the last arrival came.

The centaur was massive. His horse body at least matched Titan, and his human torso looked like a giantkin, "Damn, are all centaurs that big?" I asked.

Neral was next to me and said, "No, lord. I met the druid in the forest; she was half his size. That boy would be a danger to that druid if they got it on." He was serious, and his statement had no note of humor.

I checked, and his name was Stallone, and he was young at just 23. How did an NPC become a master animal handler at 23? Four orcs and Tanguin approached the centaur, who looked down at them imperiously. This horseman had some arrogance. Even Tanguin was a head shorter than him. The foxkin were approaching me with their offspring roped in a daisy chain to keep them from escaping again, "Lord Tallis, I presume? I am sorry for our entrance."

"No need, Harrod. You will find quite a few lively young children in this town. Yours will have to attend school so it will be up to the teachers to contain them during the day. His wife's fox face relaxed in relief and then turned delighted at the prospect of pawning off her children during the day.

She turned to her husband, "We are staying." It looked like all this enchanter needed was child daycare to complete his quest requirements.

Harrod stumbled over his words at being put at a disadvantage in negotiations. "Um, yes, Lord Tallis; what is your compensation?" He eyed his wife, whose steely gaze told me I could offer him a copper piece a month, and he would have to take it.

"Housing, food, a school for your children, and four gold a month," I offered. I had been prepared to start at six gold a month as I desperately needed him.

His wife elbowed him, and he sputtered, "Sounds more than fair." I walked with his family to the townhouse he was to be living in. The children went and started rampaging, and the mother locked herself in one of the bedrooms.

“So, Harrod, your skills will be needed tomorrow as we start the Adventurer’s Hall. After that is finished, you will be helping our town’s master enchanter, Persephone. She has a long list of projects for improving the town.” He nodded and seemed resigned to working long hours. “Don’t worry, just forty hours a week, Harrod. That is all your contract will be for.” He brightened up.

He paused, thinking. “But if I had to work late—to finish something important,” he looked at his house, and I heard a crash, “I could?” I nodded, and we both laughed. Hopefully, his kids would grow quickly with the game mechanics.

I walked home as the magic streetlights were lit, and the town was still lively as evening arrived. We had passed 1200 people today in total population. At 2,500 people, we would become a large town.

Jaesmin met me, and we ate dinner at the inn. The only news brought to my attention was our new centaur trainer was at the stables. He had a bit of a temper with the male horses--an impatience, the elf girls had said. He was butting heads, literally, with Titan. I was glad he would be heading to the orc outpost tomorrow.

Sitting at my drafting table, I grinned and added my five free points to masonry foundations. Now, with my new enchanter and my entire build team, we could tackle the Adventurer’s Guild project! I looked at my complete list of skills.

<i>Artistry: Drafting (FOCI SKILL)</i>	45	<i>Int</i>
<i>Earth Magic (FOCI SKILL)</i>	42	<i>Mag</i>
<i>Reading: Common</i>	4	<i>Int</i>
<i>Axe</i>	13	<i>Ag</i>
<i>Axe: Two-Handed</i>	15	<i>Str</i>
<i>Air Magic</i>	4	<i>Chan</i>
<i>Air Magic: Force</i>	6	<i>Str</i>
<i>Air Magic: Lightning</i>	4	<i>Spd</i>
<i>Analyze</i>	19	<i>Int</i>
<i>Artistry: Carving</i>	13	<i>Chr</i>
<i>Cooking</i>	8	<i>Ag</i>
<i>Earth Magic: Stone</i>	45	<i>Con</i>
<i>Laborer</i>	24	<i>Str</i>
<i>Leadership</i>	20	<i>Chr</i>
<i>Masonry</i>	42	<i>Str</i>
<i>Masonry: Foundations</i>	44	<i>Con</i>
<i>Masonry: Structures</i>	43	<i>Stam</i>
<i>Nature Magic</i>	15	<i>Mag</i>
<i>Nature Magic: Plant</i>	16	<i>Chan</i>
<i>Ranged</i>	36	<i>Ag</i>

<i>Riding: Land</i>	41	<i>Stam</i>
<i>Spirit Magic</i>	2	<i>Con</i>
<i>Spirit Magic: Life</i>	2	<i>Mag</i>
<i>Woodcraft</i>	34	<i>Chan</i>
<i>Woodcraft: Carpentry (23)</i>	36	<i>Luck</i>
<i>Woodcraft: Furniture</i>	12	<i>Char</i>
<i>Woodcraft: Lumberjack</i>	7	<i>Stam</i>
<i>Enchanting</i>	12	<i>Chan</i>
<i>Enchanting: Runic Script</i>	14	<i>Ag</i>
<i>Enchanting: Ritual Magic</i>	10	<i>Stam</i>

The last three skills put me over my limit, so they were in bold. I could eliminate the skill growth penalty when I hit level 25 and selected my specialization. I didn't know how I compared with other players. I know Mad Dog had nine skills at master rank to my four. I hadn't asked Grinder or Black Beauty but assumed about the same for them.

Getting all my skills to level 7 would take the cheap novice skill books that I could buy. I decided I should get those before the game launch. I sent a message with my list of skills under 8 to Grinder. He replied with a thumbs-up emoji.

I needed some of the basic melee combat skills, dodge, and parry. I could add them if I started fighting with my axe more, as I had numerous warriors in town who could train me. My character strength was in building and using stone magic to aid with construction. Most of my spell evolutions focused on better, stronger, and faster building.

I looked at my spell list.

<i>Spells</i>	<i>Tier</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Sphere</i>
<i>Meld Wood</i>	1	21	<i>Nature: Plant</i>
<i>Stone Bullet</i>	1	9	<i>Earth: Stone</i>
<i>Summon Earth</i>	1	13	<i>Earth</i>
<i>Summon Stone</i>	5	47	<i>Earth: Stone</i>
<i>Hail of Stones</i>	5	19	<i>Earth: Stone</i>
<i>Vine Growth</i>	3	7	<i>Nature</i>
<i>Summon Wood Elemental</i>	5	19	<i>Nature: Plant</i>
<i>Summon Boulder</i>	8	3	<i>Earth: Stone</i>
<i>Force Shield</i>	1	11	<i>Air:Force</i>
<i>Restore Health</i>	1	9	<i>Spirit: Life</i>

Since the spell leveling system was only introduced in the mid-testing phase, all the spell-leveling work I did early on needed to be recovered. My summon stone spell was used every day for the most part. Meld wood as well. I actually got extremely lucky since my max spell cap was just four. I had learned 10 spells before classes had been introduced and limited the

number of spells a person could learn. I needed to get my intellect stat to 110 in order to learn an 11th spell. I reviewed my stats next and pools next.

Strength	60	
Constitution	61	
Stamina	75	
Agility	52	
Speed	11	
Intellect	48	
Magic	151	
Channeling	67	
Charisma	56	
Luck	15	
Pool	Total	Regen per min
Hit Points	1675	9.7
Stamina	1445	12.2
Magic	3039	18.5

Not impressive at all. And my stats were significantly boosted by my magic items. That was going to be the key to my survival at the pre-game launch. I needed to level up and get more powerful magic items to boost my stats when I left to explore the world in a few days.

I made many mistakes because I needed to gain knowledge when I started. I was also unfamiliar with this type of detailed game with such high levels of customization. There would be many players starting the game that would greatly exceed me in strength. My strength was solely with the power of the town of Malcum and its NPCs. If I lost that, then I was doomed.

I turned my attention to drafting and designed an underground vault for my manor. A few hours later, I finished and was slightly surprised at the result.

Rare Royal Vault (ruling building upgrade), Requires Masonry Structures 23, Masonry Foundations 23 (Bonus: +10% to tax revenue) (Effect: +5 levels to palace guards, upgrade one guard one rank)

So, I could make upgrades for buildings! This was amazing! If the building it added onto had no palace guards, would the effects be different? No, they would just not work, I guessed. The structure was just a simple underground vault with drainage to prevent flooding and easily defensible. I was surprised it had come out rare. But then there was the fact that I was now a master architect. I would take it.

The morning came as I finished copying a few simple plans. The town was getting lively as I met my build team at the inn for breakfast. The foxkin, Harrod, seemed a little lost and overwhelmed with the boisterous conversations, and soon, Fareth brought out food to our table. It was quickly devoured, giving my build team the buffs needed for the day's work.

The site of the Adventurer's Guild Hall was one block from the portal stone and faced the south gatehouse barracks. A large plaza was right outside. We all got to work, and I found Harrod warming up to us. I did see Vivale chasing two of Harrod's children around lunchtime across the plaza, but she had a big smile on, so I assumed there was nothing too diabolical going on.

Neral stopped by at least five times to check his progress and provide his expertise. Basically, he was being a pain in the ass, impatient for his new building. We completed the foundation and were working our way up by late evening. There was only one emergency that required my attention all day. The two papermakers argued about who was in charge of the paper factory. They were both masters and had an ego to match. To appease them, I told them they could rotate who was in charge every week, and as soon as we could, we would build a second paper factory; there was no need to tell them that was months away!

That night, my new bodyguard arrived at my little shack and stood outside all night. He refused to come inside, even though I told him my stick golems that tended my garden would alert me if any danger presented itself. He was taking his job very seriously.

We continued on the hall the next day and finished the first floor and most of the second! One more day, and I was going to leave in search of my own adventure.

We did finish the Adventurer's Hall on the third day. It was a marvelous building, and I was excited as the furniture was being moved inside. I wanted to see the famed quest board. I wasn't expecting too much of an upgrade as I was holding all the high-quality stone in reserve for the lord's manor, but I compared the plans to the completed building.

The completed building:

Epic Adventurer's Guild (Capacity 320), 350,000 Health (Bonus: +19% experience for eight hours after resting for eight hours in a room, Effect: Spawns 275 Tier 1 quests, 220 Tier 2 quests, 165 Tier 3 quests, 55 Tier 4 quests, 11 Tier 5 quests, 55% chance for 1 Tier 6 quest, 11% chance for 1 Tier 7 quest daily)

The original plans:

Epic Adventurer's Guild (Capacity 250), 250,000 Health, Requires Masonry Foundations 43, Masonry Structures 43, Woodcraft Carpentry 43, Enchanting Ritual Magic 23 (Bonus: +15% experience for eight hours after resting for eight hours in a room, Effect: Spawns 250 Tier 1 quests, 200 Tier 2 quests, 150 Tier 3 quests, 50 Tier 4 quests, 10 Tier 5 quests, 50% chance for 1 Tier 6 quest, 10% chance for 1 Tier 7 quest daily)

The structure's capacity increased from 250 to 320, which meant it had more room for players. It also looked like the quest volume had increased by 10%.

It was late afternoon that Neral came to me and said the Adventurer's Hall was open for business. I walked inside, and a massively long bulletin board was on one wall, and it was empty. "Do we have to wait till midnight?" I asked Neral who was setting up his office.

“No, no! You need to register with me as an adventurer to see the quest offerings,” he yelled from his office. I entered, and he grinned and handed me a token. “Copper token, on the house for the city lord. You must complete 100 tier 1 quests to upgrade it to bronze.” His smile was huge. I just rolled my eyes and went to the board.

The far end now sported dozens of slips of paper. I read the first one. “You can also sort the quests in your interface rather than read the slips on the wall!” Neral yelled as he set up his office to his satisfaction. I looked at my interface, and there were 352 tier 1 quests. The extra quests were linked to Neral’s skill at running the building. I could only access the tier 2 quests once I increased my rank from copper to bronze. I looked at the ranks.

The game had some loose guidelines on the difficulty. A tier 1 quest took about an hour in the game. A tier 2 quest was about a two-hour commitment. Tier 3 was about a four-hour commitment. Tier 4 should take about a day, and at tier 4, it was possible that it was a chain quest. Tier 5 should take a week in the game, but the rewards are usually worth it. Tier 6 quests usually require an experienced group to complete.

Each rank gave an adventurer access to more and more benefits from the Adventurer’s Guild, which was universal throughout the game’s cities. One of the benefits was clearly listed, and the number of active quests a given rank could have at one time.

	ADVENTURERS RANK		Max Quests
1	Copper	Minimum level 5	1
2	Bronze	100 tier 1 quests completed	2
3	Silver	250 tier 1 quests, 100 tier 2 completed	3
4	Gold	500 tier 2 quests, 250 tier 3 completed	5
5	Platinum	500 tier 4 quests completed	8
6	Mithril	500 tier 5 quests completed	12
7	Adamantine	1000 quests completed of each tier, 1 to 6	20

I looked at the first quest.

Harvest 10 clear dusk lion hides, Rewards: 1 silver, 100 experience

I yelled to Neral, “Do these hides go into the town coffers?”

He yelled back, “No, the town gets 10% of what is turned in as a local tax. The rest goes to the Adventurer’s Guild. The quest items get ported to a larger Adventurer’s Guild Hall for use in crafting.”

Well, I didn’t have time to do little quests right now. At least I got my copper adventurer badge to start my Adventurer’s Career. I walked out to see Mad Dog and company rushing to the new building to check it out. I went to celebrate with my builders at the inn. I was leaving in the morning, so I planned to say goodbye to Jaesmin all night. We were on our third pint when the

city alarm bells went off. A runner found me leaving the inn, “The humans. They are back. And they brought an army!”