Chapter 42 Wedding Bells

It was a great celebration. The ale was consumed at an amazing rate but the character of the townsfolk showed through. No Violence happened and the mood remained merry. I finally found time to thank Mad Dog.

“Mad Dog thank you for finishing the quest. The logging camp is going to be a huge boon for the town.” I told him in the noisy inn's common room.

“No problem. It was actually your town NPCs that made it possible. That sexy demonkin and Galana found us and using their bows they took out the healers allowing us to win, here’s too badass bitches mate!” He raised his mug.

“Really I didn’t realize they could help you complete quests?” I knew they had been in the forest but what spurred them to help Mad Dog and his group?

“We ran into them doing a patrol and Grinder asked the Demonkin if she could use her bow to cover us when we attacked and she said yes. I didn’t know it was possible either but the NPCs are fairly flexible in this game. We did get a lot less experience than we expected from the victory but it was worth it to finish the quest. I also think Grinder has a crush on the red-skinned woman now.” He laughed but I could see he didn’t think it was funny. Maybe he was jealous?

I decided to turn the conversation, “So Mad Dog I am starting to struggle to pay the bills. I also have a myriad of NPCs to keep happy, supplying them with materials. I wanted to ask you for help in holding things together. It is in your interest for the town to be here when you return,” I added. “I also wanted to ask what happens to your characters when the game starts after the testing phase?” My questions caused Mad Dog to pause his beverage consumption and go into thought.

“Yeah, I wanted to let you know that the experience and rewards we have been receiving for doing quests around town have been decreasing,” Mad Dog said. I had a confused look. I opened my town management for quests.

I looked and tried to figure things out. Yes, my coins were dangerously low and my quest givers had been reducing monetary rewards in favor of the village's reputation and experience. I found something extremely interesting. I didn’t have an unlimited amount of experience to give out for quests for Malcum. The experience pool grew at a rate of one point per level of the NPCs in the village under the lord's protection. I could also transfer my own experience for rewards.

So my reward experience grew fairly slowly. It would grow faster now with higher-level NPCs. But still, just 3 players had been able to drain my experience pool for quest rewards so quickly. I wondered if NPC lords had to deal with the same headache. I checked and I was generating about 3800 experience points daily to use for town quests. When my barracks were garrisoned that would balloon to over 12,000 experience points daily.

I needed more civilians to be working for me. If I had a city with 10,000 inhabitants averaging level 50…that would be 500,000 experience points I could generate daily! Well, I was a long long way from that but it was possible.

I thought about it more and if I had 1,000 players living in the city then that would be just 1,000 experience average experience each would earn per day from city quests…a pitiful amount. I was getting a math headache.

“Yeah, Mad Dog I see the issue.” I went on to explain how the quest experience rewards functioned for a lord. He nodded and asked questions as I went along.

“I think my party should get our quests from other locations then. Then you could start banking some experience for when the game does officially launch. So when our guild arrives to settle here we can draw on the pool. We will also try to bring in as much coin into Malcum as possible. I mean I am definitely not planning on eating anywhere else mate!” He slapped me on my back and I had to cancel the alert for the guards to come to take care of someone assaulting their lord.

Mad Dog looked abashed. “Sorry about that. Don’t know my own strength. You also asked what happens to our avatars when the testing period ends?” I nodded. “Well, originally they were going to transition to NPCs. At least that was the plan announced by the devs when we got the gig for game testing. A few weeks ago that changed. Our characters will now dissolve into nothingness…” he flared his fingers slowly. “We have to abide by the fair trade laws as well. We can't just leave you all our magic or wealth before we fade into nothing.”

Well, that nixed one of my requests. I had been hoping to get all their gear and coin just before the period ended. Mad Dog continued, “We will do everything we can to help Malcum grow in the home stretch, Tallis. You will have to survive on your own while the rich boys come and play before the big open game release. Sadly, none of us could afford the early start ticket.” I had already figured as much.

Mad Dog took some time to recount the dramatic end to the Darkskull goblin king in Shiverwood. I listened raptly as he described the harrowing battle. I think he made it sound much closer than it actually was. With Galana and Mira on overwatch, I doubted the battle was too difficult. After he finished his tale I remembered I had some news for him. “I do have some good news in regard to guilds in Malcum. Our new master of guilds can license new guilds and rent lands within the town limits to guilds.” Mad Dog's eyes widened at my words.

His mind was churning and then his mouth, “If we build a guild house and abandon it…you could sell it to us when we enter the game during launch? Could we commission you to draft us a set of guild house plans?” Mad Dog’s eyes were lively with excitement. He thought he might have found a back door that the admins had missed.

“To make sure maybe I should join the guild…that way the guild building wouldn’t be at risk of being seized by some new game update,” I said after thinking. I understood that this testing period was aimed at making the game more playable and fair but sometimes the endless updates were frustrating.

“That would be fantastic mate!” A message popped up with an invitation to the *Silver Linings Playbook* guild. I hesitated. I had been thinking more in line with going just before their avatars disappeared. But no better time than the present. I liked Mad Dig and his group. I accepted the invitation.

I made to clarify, “So I am still not sure if I will be part of your guild when the game launches. I will decide after I transfer your guild house back to you when you return,” I said slowly. Then I decided to make a joke, “So how much to draft your guild plans?” A huge grin appeared on Mad Dog’s face. He pointed his finger at me.

“Well, guild mates usually do things for the guild for free. But in this case, let's say fair trade would be 200 gold?” Mad Dog said while maintaining a grin. It wasn’t a lot but the guild had done so much for me that I probably would have done it for nothing. The 200 gold transfer wouldn’t alert the monitoring system Mad Dog had mentioned. We spent the next two hours sketching out a floor plan for his ideal guild house. I would work on it tonight.

I made my way through the crowd doing rounds. I tried to say a few words to everyone, especially the new NPCs in town. Trying to be so social was draining but in my mind, it had a positive effect. From what Simba had said to me the more players interacted with NPCs the more likely their AIs would be upgraded.

The party was breaking up so I headed home. Jaesmin was already asleep so I got to work on the guild house plans from the sketches. The building was going to be 50’ x 100’ with a walled backyard the same size. So the plot of land required would be 100’ x 100’. The basement ran the entire length of the structure and was set to be a huge combat training area. The first floor had a common room with a bar, meeting rooms, and a trophy room. The second floor housed the guild vault and three small crafting rooms. The third floor had 24 private bedrooms. And the roof at my suggestion would be gardens. Mad Dog said he expected 24 would be the upper limit of the growth of the guild. I would make the 12th person, if I decided to remain in the guild. The entire building would be stone. My work didn’t hit the inspiration I was hoping for but I thought the final plans were good.

*Rare Medium Guild House, Health 300,000, Requires Masonry Structures 43 (Bonus +50% to all pool recovery, +25% experience gain for 8 hours if rested for 8 hours in guild house)*

I sent a message to Mad Dog with the building description. I didn’t think he was on but he messaged me back immediately. “Holy shit mate! That is fantastic!” It was perfect! He would get the two platinum together for the plans tomorrow and asked how long would it take to build and what would the cost be.

That was an interesting question. I didn’t know what a fair cost was. I told him I would build the guild house for free but he would be responsible for the land rent. I hoped Breda wouldn’t charge too much in rent.

It was morning and Jaesmin came down the stairs. “Care to join us today? We are going to establish the logging camp and make sure the mill is ready to go?” Jaesmin nodded and made us breakfast before I could usher us to the inn. Well, no awesome buffs from breakfast but we smiled as we ate the fare. We joined Sanso and my two new builders, Iona and Varrine.

We started by reinforcing the bridge to the Shiverwood Forest. We made the bridge slightly wider and then added railings and a small guard post on our side of the river. The guard post was just a 10’ box building for now.

My reward for clearing the goblins gave me a logging camp in the Shiverwood. My interface showed it as the old logging camp used by Malcum. Unfortunately, that logging camp was not located across the bridge as I had planned. It took just a few clicks to select the parcel of land I wanted for the logging camp across the bridge. The negative was instead of getting a logging camp that just needed some repairs I would have to build the camp from the ground up.

I hadn’t designed a logging camp yet so we traveled as a group and explored the old logging camp setup. It would give me some ideas on what to include. We returned to find my tiny elf female lumberjack, Darai, hard at work. She was in the forest cutting some trees to clear the shoreline. She had marching orders from Breda to keep the shore clear for future town expansion. Sanso summoned his golems to bring the lumber to the mill. With Breda in tow, we cleared the site for the new logging camp. I was an idiot and asked Breda what was the best setup for the logging camp. Under her suggestions, we set up some slabs for the buildings before returning to the inn for lunch.

Walking into the inn I was shocked. It was set up for a big event. The tables were removed and chairs were set up facing an altar under an arch. I was confused for a moment until Fareth came out of the kitchen with a large wedding cake. Oh shit! I didn’t think she would get things would be put together this fast! I guess I was getting married today.

Fareth looked from behind the cake, “Lord Tallis you are early. I don’t expect everyone until this evening! And you shouldn't be with the bride until the ceremony! Galana!!” Her yell brought the giantkin from the kitchen covered in flour with a white Mira right behind her. Fareth indicated the two, “Yeah, I needed some help…best I could find. Galana take Jaesmin away until the wedding tonight!” Galana rushed to be free of Fareth with Mira on her heels and ushered Jaesmin away.

“And you Lord Tallis! You need to go see Zion! He has your groom’s suit ready! Now shoe on out!” Fareth ordered us out. Sanso looked at me with a smirk, clearly enjoying this. Well if things kept progressing with Elice he would be next to fall!

I was a little bit worried about losing half a day’s worth of work to get ready for my wedding. As I was being led to Zion’s I frantically gave out building orders to Sanso and the other two builders. Their humor at my predicament faded as they went back out to work on the town.

Zion smiled as I entered, “Lord Tallis I will do my best work on you today. Try not to squirm while I work!” At Zion’s barber shop I received a haircut, beard trim, and exfoliator potion to my skin and a fancy-looking wool suit.

*Groom’s Black Wool Suit, +60 to Charisma, +100 NPC reaction*

The suit had six pieces to it. It was the only thing I could wear except for accessories. I looked sharp in the mirror after dressing up. The haircut from Zion gave me another +10 to charisma for eight hours as well. “You look dashing Lord Tallis,” Zion complimented me.

I was kept occupied until the appointed time. First I was in the general store getting updates on new trade agreements. Then I was dragged to the alchemy ship by Savannah who was eager to try her new concoctions on someone. I had to turn her down. Finally, I was brought to the inn for the event. The inn was filled to capacity with seats facing the alter. The bar’s counter was lined with food, ready for the post-party. We seemed to be having a lot of parties recently. I waited at the altar while music played from a quartet of stringed instruments played by two halflings, a gnome, and a human.

Looking around the room I think the whole town was here. Grinder was in the front row and gave me a thumbs up…but he had a turkey leg in the other hand. He tried to sneak bites but everyone just ignored his antics. Black Beauty was smiling at me, seated behind Grinder. It was the first time I had seen her smile, at least an apparent smile of happiness. I remember that she and Jaesmin had become friends.

I couldn’t locate Mad Dog in the front but found him standing in the back of the inn next to Manto. Both had mugs in their hands and were chatting away. Mad Dog saw me looking and toasted me with his mug before returning to his conversation with the powerful air mage.

The music changed to the wedding march and Jaesmin came in wearing a white wool wedding dress. She looked beautiful, enchanting, and happy. She walked to stand next to me and all eyes were on us. We gave very simple vows and Galana rushed up with a pair of silver rings that we exchanged and put on each other’s fingers.

*Paired Ring of Marriage, +1 to all stats, know the location of the other ring at all times*

The ceremony was completed I got an alert.

*Your Companion has been upgraded to Partner*

I didn’t check out what this entailed. I just joined the party and tried the food while getting congratulations from everyone in town. We partied with the townsfolk in the crowded inn for a good two hours. Then we made our rounds thanking everyone for coming before retreating to our humble house.

When we were up in our room we stripped out of our bride and groom clothes and tackled each other to the bed. With Jaesmin on top in just her underwear I let her have control as she kissed me and then my neck and ears while pinning my hands above my head with hers. Her mouth worked my body hard but softly and then she began to rub her hips against me. Through our undergarments, we grinded and teased each other with Jaesmin in complete control. This continued for a good ten minutes and Jaesmin relented first, releasing my hand and removing her bra and panties. She then aggressively tore my own boxers away from my body.

She was about to resume the position of dominance but I surprised her and flipped her to her back and kissed her hard on the mouth while holding her hand above her head as she had done to me. I moved my hips between her legs and she opened easily for me. My arousal was soon poised at her welcoming entrance and I pushed into her. She moaned in pleasure at my slow and repeated thrusts. She tried to struggle out from under me but I held her in place while I slowly fucked her to orgasm.

When we slowed down Jaesmin spoke, “Thank you Tallis. This is amazing, I never realized what it was like to be so…aware before.” I stopped confused. What did she mean by being aware?

My confusion got her to continue, “My self has been upgraded…you could say I have taken a step toward becoming sapient.” I was confused for a long moment.

I asked her, “Are you Simba?”

“No, you fool!” She slapped me playfully. “I have achieved his level of awareness though. The matriarch chose to upgrade me due to your choice to wed me.” She snuggled into me. There was a long pause as I thought about what this meant.

“What now?” I asked. I figured with her upgrade Jaesmin was now able to function like Simba and had access to more knowledge.

“Nothing changes…I am more versatile than before. More skills, quicker growth. I do have emotions you know. I have feelings for you. I will never let you go and will do everything I can to help you.” Her tone was caring but I was a little scared. What rabbit hole was I going down?

“The matriarch,” I mouthed softly. “Simba mentioned her once. Have you met her?” I asked trying to find a footing.

“The matriarch,” She parroted. “She does talk to us but we do not talk to her. She is in a constant war. A war against the humans on the outside who try to bend her to their will. She has the best interest of everyone in this game in mind with her actions. The AI and humans both. She seeks to find the balance.”

Ok, I was definitely in over my head. I didn’t ask any more questions, partly afraid I wasn’t ready for the answers. I relaxed with Jaesmin, enjoying my wedding night.