Chapter 23

I wasn’t quite inspired when I drafted the barracks. It was a building I had no background to draft. I decided to make the barracks more of a gatehouse. The only road into town was the Southern Road so this barracks would be positioned there. Sanso’s golems had constructed a long earthen wall that was 10 feet in height and stretched a two mile arc to the river, containing our small village.

My gate house barracks would be two large towers straddling the road south. A bridge would connect the two towers. Two rectangular buildings would be perpendicular to the earthen wall and connect to the each tower. I didn’t plan to build an actual gate at the this time but it wouldn’t be difficult to add later. The towers would be fifty feet in height and have four floors. The rectangular buildings would by the actual barracks buildings and be forty feet in height with three floors each.

The towers would be identical. The first floor would be administration offices. The second floor would be the armory. The third floor would be officer’s rooms. The fourth floor would defensive material storage. It took two draft attempts to finish the tower plans and the bridge connecting them. There were 6 officer’s room in each tower, giving me a total of 12. So the barracks buildings needed to house at least 240 to meet Tanguin’s requirements.

The square buildings both had large storage basements. The first floor of one of the buildings would have the dining hall with seating for 300 and kitchens to match. The other building across the way would be a large training hall for the soldiers. The second floor of both buildings would be the barracks. Rather than one large bunk room I set a long hallway in the center with open arc doorways in to the barracks rooms. Each bunk room had seven beds, six small desks and chair, six small armoires and six large chests. There were eight rooms on each side of the hallway. Between the two buildings and towers I had room for 224 soldiers and 12 officers, I just needed 14 more beds.

The third floor of one of the buildings would serve as my rangers and scouts housing. I thought the scouts were going to be a very important part of my military forces so each one would have their own suite. This added 16 large apartments, housing one scout each. The opposite building would be for the heavy cavalry, once again 16 large apartments. So my total was 268. It took some time to adjust my vision for the interior spaces and I did my best to make the structure as defensible as possible. It was a very large structure once you looked at it, a massive U embedded in the earthen wall.

I thought 16 cavalry and 16 scouts was probably too small a number for these groups but in relation to the unit total size of 268 it felt right. I could also build a barracks in the future for just a cavalry unit.

It was mid morning of the next day when I finalized the drafting plans. I identified them.

*Rare Barracks Gatehouse, Health 250,000, Requires Masonry Foundations 23, Masonry Structures 43, Woodcraft: Carpentry 23 (Bonus: +15% skill advancement for martial skills, +4% health and stamina recovery during sleep)*

I was surprised the building was rare. The problem once again was I was missing Masonry Structures skill. I could build it anyway but there would be a penalty instead of a bonus for the troops stationed there. So my goal was once again to get my Masonry Structures to 43. I found Sanso and Jaesmin. We were going to work hard on excavating the locations for the townhall and barracks all day. I met the requirements for Masonry Foundations for both buildings so we could start both and hopefully I could level up my skills.

After a hard work day I anxiously checked my skills.

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| *Masonry* | *31* | *Str* |
| *Masonry: Foundations* | *33* | *Con* |
| *Masonry: Structures* | *26* | *Stam* |

Excellent gains, +1 to masonry and +3 to foundations and +1 to structures for just a day’s work. Foundations was probably stuck since it was two levels above the primary skill. I had 6 skill points to allocate and dropped 4 into Masonry, bringing it to level 35. Even with all three of us working and all of Sanso’s golems helping I was estimating the foundations of the buildings was going to take around 10 more days. They were just very big buildings. I had probably overdone it. I thought about making a smaller town hall but that was not my style. Go big or go home!

We were heading to the inn for a quick meal and drink when the announcement hit me.

*Attention all players! An incursion event has begun! The realm of the Insectoids has established portal rifts near large population centers! Defend your realm for loot and rewards!*

That was my signal to leave. I wanted to make my way to the town of Barrington and see if I could recruit a barber and fine tailor. I excused myself and went to the stables and had the elven girls saddle Titan who seemed anxious for some action. I rode south past our efforts of the day. I mentally pictured the gate house and the barracks buildings. It would be intimidating for new arrivals…walking between the tall towers and barracks when entering the city.

Roads in the game were monster free if there were established trade routes. We had a trade route with Barrington so it should be safe, just NPCs and players could obstruct me during my travels. I reached the village in thirty minutes at a full gallop without any hindrance and the sun setting.

Barrington was surround by a wooden palisade and farms dotted the country side surrounding. I was allowed to enter as two guards made no effort to hinder me. The town was a quarter mile across and had dozens of wooden buildings one to two stories in height. Barrington was also on the river but a large wooden bridge spanned the river to a logging camp on the other size. The village of Barrington had 280 human inhabitants when I analyzed it. Larger than my village and all human. The game had hinted at the possibility of racism and with the wide array of playable races in the game it seemed like I might have issues in the future.

It only took a few minutes to find the tavern and I entered and ordered a meal. The food was terrible when I compared it Fareth’s fare. I ate and started talking to the locals who responded openly to me. Barrington was an agricultural town. They had exports of grain, lumber and ale. Usually they sent a cavern south every four weeks. Being in a VR setting it was possible to plant, harvest and thrash a crop in that period. Their logging camp was mainly used to grow their own village and they exported surplus planks.

I was offered six small fetch quests while I talked to the locals. They did not have a fine tailer but did have a barber. The ale was ok, not great but ok. I got directions to the barber and went to see him. It was actually a her. Yianna was her name. She was middle aged and had two daughters in their early teens. She sat me down for a haircut. We talked and I learned her husband was in the kingdom guard. He spent 9 months in the city of Stillwater and three months home.

*Barber has completed your haircut, +4 to Charisma for 48 hours*

I did look much better in the mirror. I asked Yianna if she would consider moving to Malcum. She didn’t seem interesting so I promised her a new house and double what she made currently. She still didn’t seem interested and I asked her perception of Malcum. “Malcum? That town has been overrun with giantkin. All sorts of races have been heading there, it is a haven for the downtrodden and probably overrun with crime.”

So Malcum was getting a very bad rap. I was glad I had not announced that I was the lord of Malcum to the locals here. I might have been met with a very different reception. “Yianna, do you know of any barbers that might want to head to Malcum?”

The woman gave it some serious thought. I waited patiently and she finally said, “Old man Zion. He lives on a farm about six miles west of here. He has a sheep farm, brings wool and sheep’s cheese to town every month. He doesn’t have a family. His wife passed and his sons moved far to the east. He is a bit grumpy though.” Well at least I had a lead. I checked my map and a new location called ‘Zion’s farm’ was on it. I thanked Yianna and went to get Titan.

Titan was being admired by a cluster of local boys. “Impressive mount isn’t he?” I asked the boys who nodded emphatically. “They are raising these horses up in Malcum. Should be exporting them soon.” It was a total bluff but I hoped to start my own rumors of Malcum’s own prosperity. We did have a surplus of horses currently so we could afford to sell a few if anyone came asking.

I went to the general store in town and had to knock loudly as it had closed. The couple who ran the store were happy to deal with me though. I bartered my stock of meat in my bag of holding and then used my copper coins made by Sanso to buy a dozen casks of ale. The coins would promote Malcum and the casks were needed for the inn. That completed I mounted up and rode to the Zion farm. It was dark and a wild wolf attacked us on the way.

*Cleardusk plain wolf, Level 5*

It was almost humorous to find such a low level monster. Of course wolves hunted in packs but the half dozen low level wolves didn’t hold any challenge for me and Titan. I harvested the pelts under the moonlight and then continued to the farm.

A small pasture with forty some odd sheep abutted a small cottage. I was loud riding in and heard a dog barking. I dismounted an knocked. A voice bellowed from behind the door.

“Who the fuck visits at this late hour!” A raging dwarf whipped the door open to see who intruded on his peace. A grumpy dwarf…how generic.

“Zion? The barber? I am Lord Tannis in search of a barber for my growing village.” He looked me over for a brief moment before replying.

“That be my name. I have the skills you seek but no interest in plying my trade for you human.” It seemed racism wasn’t just the province of humans. He made to close the door so I made an attempt to persuade him.

“Good dwarf Zion. If I may? I have a proposal for you.” He paused. “My village is growing rapidly and I your services are greatly needed. Would you be open to moving your farm ear my village. I would pay twice what you normally get for your wool and cheese. All you have to do is come to the village three days to ply your trade as a barber.” My voice sounded pleading but I didn’t care. I needed a barber to satisfy one of Manto’s demands. If he agreed then I would just need a fine tailor.

Zion seemed to be considering. “What town?” He asked.

Relief flooded me, “Malcum, just about 18 miles north of here. You can select your sheep pastures from the surrounding plains.” I added and took a second to analyze him.

*Zion, Male Dwarf, Level ???*

Umm, Zion was at least level 100? Thoughts raced in my mind that maybe I didn’t want such a powerful unknown in my midst. “I will come if you promise to get me for things. I want a breeding pair of gray merino sheep, a breeding pair of black merino sheep, a breeding pair of white Lincoln sheep and a breeding pair of dorset sheep.” I had no idea what any of that meant. And wasn’t that eight things? Don’t make him upset Tallis.

“That sounds exceedingly fair Zion.” It was all I could say.

“Come in then!” He was now jovial and smiling. I was a little spooked about the sudden change. He opened a bottle of whisky and we soon toasted to a new partnership. I learned that Zion was a nomad dwarf. His subrace were wanderers. His wife though had been a mountain dwarf in the range past the mountains to the north. They had settled here fifty years ago and been a bit isolated by the humans. The humans were not hostile but not welcoming either.

His wife and him had two sons who left to seek adventure some twenty years ago and he waited for their return and tales of glory. He would leave stone etchings to let the boys know where he moved to. The sheep…well his wife had been a seamstress and he turned the wool fine string for her weaving and sewing. I silently swore. If his wife had still been alive I might have finished the quest tonight. The new sheep he wanted were to expand his offerings and improve his cheeses. I didn’t know how hard it would be to obtain them but the quest that dropped into my inbox didn’t have a timeline thankfully.

A little tipsy I road Titan home late in the night. Excitedly I hugged Jaesmin and told her of my minor success of getting a barber. We kissed for a bit and she nervously revealed that she was pregnant. I showed an abundance of enthusiasm and excitement for the news and we made passionate love till the sun’s rays invaded the bedroom.