

Chapter 16: Game Updates

I was having an internal dilemma. The loss of the townsfolk was weighing heavy on me. It shouldn't have been, as they were just digital code. It also went beyond the loss to the town's prosperity. This might be my reality for the rest of my life. I still wasn't convinced the programmer had told me the truth that I still had a body in the real world.

According to Simba, I would gain access to the world's internet once the game went live after the testing period. I would have to think about this more, but I already knew I was treating the people in my village as real people.

I went to check on my horses. Damn, there were a lot of them! Curraen was there talking with his daughters. They were discussing saddles. I joined them briefly before asking for the best horse to be saddled with my new saddle. He was a big one, about 20% larger than the others and just a tad smaller than Galana's mount she had taken on the trade caravan. The young elves had no difficulty saddling him, though.

I learned from Curraen while I was watching them that his daughters had some minor nature magic and a *soothe beast* spell. That explained a lot. The girls complained it was too crowded for the horses, and I wanted to retort that they were just animals in a digital world, but I held my tongue. I said I would have Sanso build them some stone stables soon.

I mounted and took off at a run, and it was exhilarating! I must have been going around 40 miles per hour, and it was a fairly smooth ride! When prompted, I accepted the riding skill. I went straight to the tower. The place was cleaned up, and two guards were atop. I tethered my mount and spent an hour repairing the door. My slab made a nice paved entryway, I wondered if my people had retrieved the orcs I had crushed underneath it? I climbed the tower to look over the ineffectual earthen wall.

Out on the plains, you could see dots for the encounters. I went to my mount and headed out onto the plains, running down encounters one by one. My mount needed a name, he was a great steed, and we were starting to bond. I decided on Titan. I analyzed Titan.

Titan, Black Mountain Steed, Level 16, Health 1619, Experience 650, Attack 52-108, Defense 68

I switched to my axe, and we continued across the plains. The saddle properties were making everything so easy. I didn't even realize when we reached the buffalo. I took one down before turning south into the unexplored region of my map. Buffalo started to disappear, and the terrain began to contain less grass. From nearby, the earth exploded, and a giant scorpion emerged. Fortunately, we were moving fast, and it couldn't attack. I tried to analyze it but got nothing useful.

Giant Scorpion, Level ??, Health ??, Experience ??, Attack ??, Defense ??

Since we were much faster, I was able to cast *hail of stones* and move out of range. We repeated this a half dozen times before the beast fell. I gathered the stinger as that was the only thing that looked valuable. It was evening, and I had a few hours of daylight left. We rode further south

and pulled more scorpions. I managed to get five of them in a group and turned them to mush with repeated *hail of stones*. This was almost too easy!

Our second group had four scorpions. Our third had six. Our fourth had three, and when they fell, I leveled! The sun was also starting to set, and we were 100 miles from the village. We took off at the best speed and returned two hours after dark. There were five guards in the tower, and I waved as I returned home. The elven girls were there waiting for me and admonished me for working out Titan so hard today. I could have sworn the horse rolled his eyes at the girls, but it was dark.

I went inside and found Jaesmin at the table. She jumped up and ran to hug me. She was worried, but she knew that I would resurrect if I died. Still, it felt good to have someone worrying about you. I sat at the table and told her of my day. She did the same.

Galana had pushed the trade expedition to leave quickly and would make all possible haste to return quickly. They left mid-afternoon. Sanso was close to finishing the tower by the river with Jaesmin's help. I pulled out my stable plans and handed them to Jaesmin. Her next project was to build three separate stables. I would come to supervise as she and Sanso did not have high enough proficiency in the related building skills.

I opened my map and looked at where I had traveled. The scorpion area was called the Valley of the Azul. I then opened my character sheet. I added my two acquired skill points to earth magic. My masonry and carpentry skills were 24 and 21 respectively, so I was good to build the inn. Well, I just needed two points in Masonry: Foundations. Next, I put four points into intelligence and two into magic.

Then, it was time to read my backlog of notifications. The axe and the two-handed axe both climbed 3 points to 10 and 12, respectively. Analyze was up a single point, and I had not been using it as much recently. I needed to go back to analyzing everything.

The next skill showing an increase was drafting, up five points to 29. The earth magic was up 8 points as well as stone magic, 18 and 20! Damn, I hadn't thought about it much. But I had been using stone magic a lot. I marveled at the earth magic skills for a bit before seeing leadership was up two points. Masonry was up to 25, foundations 22, and structures 15. One more point was all I needed in foundations!

Nature magic and plant each gained one point. Ranged was up to 23! Gaining a ridiculous 10 points. Looking at the logs, I see that it was mostly from killing those scorpions. Hail of Stones counted as a ranged targeted attack. Riding land was up to 20? I just learned the skill yesterday. It was actually at 14, but the saddle gave me +6 to the skill, but it was still incredible leveling.

Other skills gained some percentage increases on their advancement bar toward the next level, but none advanced. The game seemed a bit broken. On my mount, I got battle experience for the scorpions for four different skills: riding, earth magic, stone magic, and ranged. Which I should take advantage of before they fix this semi-cheat. With my incredible mount and its superior speed, I was killing creatures at a much higher level than I was.

During the evening, I quickly redrafted the stables to make them all stone since we had no wood. Next, I worked on the library. I was just excited to go kill scorpions tomorrow and used drafting to calm myself. The detailed work on the library was coming along. I had great Roman arches all over the building. Large spaces everywhere. The building itself was almost a half mile round. At its zenith was a large room for a stellar observatory. The observatory was nearly five hundred feet up. The sun rose, I retrieved Titan from the stables. I helped Sanso and Jaesmin finish the first stable. Sanso then taught me a new spell, *boulder crush*.

Boulder Crush Earth: Stone Tier 8, Magic Cost: 100, Effect: Summon a large boulder that is hurled at your target, Damage: 250, Casting Time: 3 seconds

With my earth and ranged bonuses, this spell did 500 damage! Now we were cooking! I paid Sanso for the spell, ran to the already-saddled Titan, and went off.

I skipped the encounters with lions on the plains. We galloped at amazing speed to the scorpion area. When we arrived, we started pulling scorpions. We pulled seven in our first swing. Easy kills. The second group was a little tricky. While I was leading the group, trying to find a few more, we got ambushed. I was stabbed in the thigh for 210 damage, and the poison status, 10 damage every second for 30 seconds! Crap.

That was one-third of my health after the poison damage! I would have to be more careful. I finished off the group and started another pull. My day continued as such. It was repetitive but rewarding. We narrowly avoided two more surprise attacks and escaped being encircled once by a large group.

After a few hours, I leveled up. I counted the fresh poison stingers in my bag, 67. Hmm, that many kills? I had enough daylight to repeat this number. I ate some jerky while my magic pool regenerated. Level 13...6 points into magic. Skill points went into earth magic. This was because I was losing stone magic leveling because I was two levels up. I returned to Titan, who was also interested in getting back to killing. The sun was close to disappearing when I leveled again. I smiled and urged Titan home. He broke into a sprint, eager to show his speed.

I rushed past the tower and home. I unsaddled Titan and put him in the new stable. One of the elf girls was sleeping in the loft and came down to feed him. I practically skipped home, adding six points to magic and two skill points to earth magic. Checking my skills, drafting up one point, earth magic up to 26, and stone magic also at 26! Foundations hit level 23! About damn time. Ranged was up to level 27, and finally, riding land was up to 19, 25 once the saddle was added in. I also completed the quest to protect the orc refugees as the timer hit zero.

I was so excited at dinner that I didn't even realize what I was eating and just talking about my day to Jaesmin. Jaesmin reciprocated with her day. Sanso and her were close to finishing the second stable. Also, some lumber had arrived from Barrista. Barrista was the town 15 miles south of us. Apparently, Elice had traded for a steady supply of lumber from Barrista on her way south. Good idea!

I could start building the first floor of the inn. The night was spent drafting the library. The morning was helping Sanso and Jaesmin finish inn. Then, I was off to the plains to hunt scorpions again. That was pretty much my week: work on the stables or inn, hunt for 14 hours,

come home, and draft the library. I had been very efficient and made huge gains in stats. My level was now at 19. The scorpions I learned were level 25 on average, and I was getting a lot less experience now. All stat points went to magic, and all skill points went to earth magic. My skills now looked like this:

<u>Skill</u>	<u>Level</u>
<i>Axe</i>	11
<i>Axe: Two Handed</i>	13
<i>Air Magic</i>	0
<i>Air Magic: Force</i>	0
<i>Air Magic: Lightning</i>	0
<i>Analyze</i>	14
<i>Artistry: Carving</i>	11
<i>Artistry: Drafting</i>	37
<i>Cooking</i>	6
<i>Earth Magic</i>	40
<i>Earth Magic: Stone</i>	40
<i>Laborer</i>	11
<i>Leadership</i>	17
<i>Masonry</i>	27
<i>Masonry: Foundations</i>	24
<i>Masonry: Structures</i>	17
<i>Nature Magic</i>	11
<i>Nature Magic: Plant</i>	11
<i>Ranged</i>	35
<i>Reading: Common</i>	3
<i>Riding: Land</i>	40
<i>Spirit Magic</i>	0
<i>Spirit Magic: Life</i>	0
<i>Woodcraft</i>	23

Woodcraft: Carpentry (23)

25

Woodcraft: Furniture

10

I received an alert that the auction was closing in one hour, and I opened it to check. There were 77 bids, but no one outbid me on any of my selections. That was a relief. The inn was just about done...unfortunately my village quality had not increased in time to add more auction bids.

The auction finished, and I checked on my bids...