

I decided to visit the dock and witness the men at work with my own eyes. It was the early hours of the morning, and several farmers trundled down to the waterfront using horses and carts. Each one was filled to bursting with bags of excess grain and other foodstuffs that we didn't have a use for. The people in the Black Cove would pay handsomely for it.

When the carts arrived, a gaggle of sailors would demount the trading ship and take each sack up onto the deck one by one, by hand. A crane system would do well to make the process smoother in future, but I didn't know how to build one. I'd need to find some intelligent people to help us out – maybe Duke Polemarch would be willing to export some knowledge to us in the future.

The farmer would tell the traders how much was in the bag, and a cursory measurement would be taken using a pulley system and a measurement bag of the same weight. If it was in the right wheelhouse, they'd be paid on the spot.

I did get some kind of voyeuristic enjoyment out of watching money change hands at a dock I had ordered to be built. This was the next big step to us becoming a real, functioning town where you could pay for a haircut with money instead of a spare chicken. The socialist dream was ending, I muttered to myself sardonically.

Hopefully those farmers would use their newfound earnings and spend it on things in town. I knew how dumb trickle-down economics was, but hopefully in this small, isolated environment without a centralized banking system it would come true. Some of that cash would be leaving our hands in the next few days as they spent it on things they needed to operate their farms normally again.

That would translate to increased productivity, more food to export, more money coming in.

The question of taxation still rested heavily on my mind though.

One of the farmers, a man named Wilson, descended back down the boat's ramp with a bag filled with coin. When he spotted me leaning against one of the supporting logs and observing the proceedings, he decided to come over and talk with me. "Morning Lord-Mayor," he greeted me cheerfully.

"Shane will do. Or Sir Blackwood if you're feeling formal."

"It is a rather unwieldy title, isn't it? It looks like your mind is on something important."

"Uh. Just the eternal question of taxation."

His cheery grin fell, "I see..."

"Unfortunately, people are going to expect payment for their services someday soon. So maintaining those communal sewers, and expanding some of our other projects will be much harder."

"Hm. But I heard from some family friends that they really love the sewerage in town. Smells much nicer."

"It does. But it isn't free."

I followed him up the path to his cart and horse. He hefted an empty replacement sack into the back, provided by the sailors. "Maybe you could ask the people who use it to pay for the maintenance?"

I clenched my teeth, “Seems a little unfair given that we hoisted it onto them. It might force some of them to move into homes without it. If we’re launching a taxation scheme here, it needs to be fair and equitable.”

“Aye. I suppose so. I’m not so educated on things like that myself.”

We had a few people who had expressed interest in basically working as full-time government agents. Taking care of things that needed to be done and cleaning out the sewers if a clog happened. I liked the idea. I wanted civil servants to handle those kinds of tasks, but we’d need to pay them a wage. I could organize a stop-gap solution where they received food and services from the townspeople for free...

But that was what I was trying to move away from. I wanted to give them the freedom to spend their money as they chose. Eventually people would start to refuse being offering services for their good – people were being understanding for the sake of the town. I held no illusions; some people would become more difficult over time. I understood their perspective. I wouldn’t want to work for “free” either.

“How was the sale, anyway?”

“It went well! A good profit for our hard work, it’s like the old days again. We can finally afford to pay some of the fine folk in town for their help.”

“And tools?”

Wilson didn’t seem so certain, “Some of the farmers are interested in buying some of those new-fangled machines that they have in the Black Cove.”

“Machines?”

“Aye. They run on concentrated rock-magic. The kind of thing that those mages use across the sea.”

This was the first time anybody had mentioned ‘magic’ to me in regular conversation. There *were* notes in my godly encyclopaedia that gave me a rough idea of what it was and who used it – but to say that I was sceptical of something so fantastical would be an understatement. I wanted to see it with my own eyes. For all I knew ‘concentrated rock-magic’ could be a piece of coal.

“...Is that rare?”

“Yes. They have to import it from them. To me, it sounds like a bum deal. Pay for the machine, pay for the fuel to move it. How are you supposed to turn a profit working like that?”

“Depends on how good the machine is.”

If they were anything like the farming machines that we had back home, they may just push the town’s economy away from farming and into higher level production. They had the basics, so much so that around half of the people living here could work elsewhere. But fertilizer and horse-drawn tillers would only get us so far.

Wilson didn’t seem enthusiastic, “Hm. I’ll pass on it for now. Wait and see what they think if they take the plunge.”

“Yeah, probably a good idea!”

“It was nice talking with you Shane, but I’ve got a busy day ahead of me. See you later.”

I nodded and stepped aside. He hopped onto the seat and took the reins.

“Stay safe.”

I watched as he doubled-back and set off on the journey down to the agricultural area. It was good to see that our new exchange programme was working as intended. Farmers selling their surplus goods to bring money into our economy, and Duke Polemarch would be very happy to have a cheaper, closer source of food for his own settlements.

When I returned to my office an hour later, my spirits had been buoyed by the success of our first trading route. The farmers had nothing but good things to say about the prices they received, or the ease of transporting their hard work to the docks to sell on.

But I also had some busywork to complete. I'd been planning a further expansion of the residential area in anticipation of new residents and refugees arriving from the surrounding towns and villages. Some people would come in search of a new start, while others would have been forced from their homes by religious strife.

I had also given the go-ahead for the builders to create the first Laddite chapel in the town. They found a lovely patch of land atop a nearby hill. It would only take them a few days to complete the wooden building, as it was a simple construction that didn't need any special infrastructure to operate. We had also agreed to place the town's graveyard there should any of our residents pass away.

I looked at my 'to-do' list and was extremely happy to declare that a vast majority of the key issues had been handled. The hardest ones were yet to come though – taxes especially.

My planning was interrupted by the arrival of Amelie and Anton, who busted through my door at a rapid speed, skidding to a halt in front of my desk.

“Good morning Amelie, Anton.”

Anton slammed his hands onto my desk, “Mayor, we have a problem.”

I sighed and put down my quill, “What is it?”

“The farmers are at each other's throats over the land they've been given. And no amount of argument from me is changing their minds.”

This was the last damn thing I needed to happen. “What happened exactly? Why are they fighting?”

“Owen Frank has gotten the idea in his head that his land is less fertile than the others, and he's raising hell about it. Then to make the problem even worse, William built a gazebo for his kids that Andrew is saying is crossing the boundary into his plot. Everyone's picking sides – and I'm afraid they're all going to do something stupid if we don't calm 'em down.”

That was a lot to take in. Owen, William and Andrew. A spot of inconvenience that had led to multiple perceived problems compounding on top of each other. I stood from my chair and pulled open one of my storage drawers, I was looking for something in particular. It didn't take me too long to find it.

“Here we are. This is the original land plan I made when we set up the farming plots.”

With this, I could solve the issue with people crossing into each other's property. The fertility matter was another thing though. Without revealing the power of my eye, how could I convince Owen that

his land was just as fertile as the rest? I handed the map to Anton and followed him back out of the office. He already had a cart waiting for us. All three of us hopped on and he whipped the horse into action.

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“I’m tellin’ you, this is my land William! There was a darn fence right here!”

“You weren’t even using it anyway! I’m not knocking down my hard work based on your gut feeling!”

When we arrived at the location of the brawl – the two men were still arguing about it. At the very back left corner of the fields, where they met, stood a small wooden structure painted white. A gazebo for William and his family to relax in when they weren’t busy working and the weather was fair.

Anton clapped his hands and grabbed their attention, “You two. I went *all the way* back into town and got the damn Mayor to come out – so ya’ll better have a good argument because he’s gonna’ have the final say.”

I didn’t need to hear any arguments. The way that the gazebo jutted out from William’s side of the fields onto Andrew’s was obvious even from a cursory inspection. Still, I stood back and allowed the two men to air their grievances to me to appear impartial as possible. “Andrew, did you warn William about the problem beforehand?”

Andrew motioned to the empty farmland on his side of the fence, “Not at the moment. I don’t have the seeds I need to sow the entire place just yet. I don’t come back here too often. By the time I noticed, he’d already finished building the darn thing.”

William pointed at Andrew and jeered, “See! You ain’t even using it!”

I stepped in before they came to blows, “William, with all due respect, I personally measured and marked every square meter of these parcels for you. We planted stakes, built fences, and drew maps.” Anton unfurled the document in question, which I used to pinpoint the exact location that we were stood at. “These plots are square, and equal in size. You’ve constructed this on Andrew’s land.”

Andrew crossed his arms and nodded along with my explanation.

“While I appreciate that you don’t want to take down your hard work, I want you to put yourself into Andrew’s shoes for a moment. How would you feel if he built something on your land without permission?”

William’s jaw clenched, “I’d... I’d be a mite angry about it.”

“The two of you; I want you to resolve this properly. I don’t care what happens to the gazebo, take it down, move it, build another one – anything. But just remember that you should treat the people around you how *you’d* like to be treated.” The two men still seemed resistant to my suggestion. I wrapped my arm around William’s back and pulled him towards Andrew, “Shake on it.”

They stared each other down for a moment before begrudgingly doing as I asked. People could be really stubborn when they had done something wrong. “Sorry Andrew. I was being a pig.”

“No harm done. Let’s do what Anton and the Mayor said and do this right.”

Happy that the first problem had been dealt with, we left the pair to sort out the logistics of the gazebo. Anton smiled and patted me on the back, "Thank you kindly Mayor. Those two were as stubborn as a pair of mules."

"That went a lot smoother than I was expecting..."

Amelie snickered, "You scolded them like a pair of children."

Anton was still concerned, "Hardest job's coming up right here. Owen's house."

Owen's farmhouse was big and it was painted red. Very loud compared to the other buildings that surrounded it. It reminded me of a big American ranch. Owen was already waiting for us on the porch. He glared down at us as we ascended the steps to meet him.

"Anton, you brought this fella' down here to try and sweet talk me?"

Anton wasn't pleased with him, "Owen, you won't believe me. You won't believe the others. So I brought the Mayor down here to have a word with you."

"Bah! He's a noble. They're all the same. He'll just say what I want to hear and that'll be the end of it. So save your breath and bugger off!"

What a friendly guy...