

After the drama of the open court hearing, Polemarch escorted me and Amelie to his office. The room was mostly empty and almost completely untouched. The furniture hadn't been broken in and the carpet was pristine. I got a nose full of that new carpet smell as he wandered over to the double-sided bed against the left wall. He retrieved something from it and returned with a grin on his face.

"They artisans were so excited about a new family being elevated that they bombarded me with dozens of designs for your family crest."

"A crest?"

"That's right. Every family has a symbol. That symbol is also incorporated into the flag of your county. When I told them your name – they immediately leapt at the chance to make this."

He unfurled the object in his hands, revealing a long banner of four black and white squares, placed in alternating positions in each corner. The white corners were filled with a matching black silhouette of a tall tree.

Blackwood. Hilarious.

"Looks good to me."

Polemarch was shocked that I agreed to quickly, "Are you sure? You can request a different one, if you desire."

"A few weeks ago, I didn't even know I was going to *be* a noble. The banner is fine."

He chuckled, "I forgot you were so practically minded. Very well. This banner will now stand to represent Celeste's Landing. Though to be perfectly honest – families change their iconography on a whim these days. No sense of tradition."

I took a seat at the small table and rested my legs. They were aching after hours of standing still. Polemarch rolled the banner back up and placed it next to a bronze stand, seemingly intended to hold the fabric aloft in a prominent position. My primary concerns were getting murdered, and what I was going to do next with the town.

"Alright, let's talk business now that you're officially in charge," Polemarch said, taking the seat across from me, "Do you have any big plans for Celeste's Landing?"

"I want to make it a nice place to live?"

"Not really a plan, but we can work with that. I think our first job is connecting Celeste's Landing with the Black Cove. The docks can handle the bigger traders and ship owners, but for everyone else we'll need to create a road."

An interesting point. Usually roads in Lunarmar were made simply by people flattening and killing the grass as they passed over it. After enough time the paths would form naturally and show people where to go. Stone roads were usually reserved for larger towns and cities. Celeste's Landing had only existed for a couple of months, and there were no people travelling between there and the Duke's land.

"If we're going to do it, we should do it right the first time."

He nodded, "I agree. But the quantity of stone required for a proper passageway will be a challenge for us. Celeste's Cove has a plentiful supply of quarriable locations, but not the men to exploit them. I would rather gather the materials ourselves than pay for them."

“Yes. That is a problem. The miners are still working for me for free, though I’d like to pay them a proper wage for their work soon. There aren’t enough of them to build a road of that length, and much of their time is occupied working on our sewerage.”

“Speaking of sewerage, I’d like to ask you about that.”

“Go ahead.”

“Why did you decide that sewers were the number one priority for your residential area?”

“I’ll say the same thing to you that I said to them – would you like to consume excrement? Or do you enjoy the smell of it?”

He shook his head vigorously, “No.”

“Yet many people are forced to live in towns and cities where a deluge of waste is thrown from windows and into the streets. Not only does it make life worse for the people living there, but it also seeps into the water supply. Heaven forbid that someone there is ill. They could easily spread it to hundreds of homes and kill dozens of people.”

Polemarch had a realization in that moment – that I had a point. Why *did* people put up with living in faeces covered streets?

“Even a simple drainage ditch that leads away from wells and water sources can make a big difference. So when we started planning our new town, I made sure that everything was in place to make it happen.”

“But the expense is large, and the local residents would need to approve.”

“It is, but anything worth doing is expensive. Maybe I lied a bit when I said I want to make this town a nice place to live. I want it to be the *best* place to live. I want to build a city so amazing that everyone else will have to copy me to keep up. The houses of my workers are going to be like palaces versus what you can get here in the capital.”

“Ah, now you’re talking like a leader.”

“But a lot of people are going to ask questions about how or why I make those decisions. Like you said just now, the average noble doesn’t think so much about the negative effects of having poo everywhere, or that it’s too expensive to justify.”

“Uh-huh.”

“But at the end of the day, people are money and power. They make things to trade, they pay taxes, they’re the ones who you need to keep happy.”

“That’s interesting,” Polemarch said with a pensive look on his aged features. “Then perhaps we should use your new town as a testing ground for these radical ideas of yours? They’ll quickly diffuse across the Kingdom if they work.”

I wasn’t expecting him to be so open to my ramblings. Though he had seen the positive impact of my sewer system with his own eyes. I turned to look at Amelie for affirmation, but she remained stone-faced during the discussion.

“You’re the Lord-Mayor, make your own decisions,” seemed to be what she was trying to tell me. Non-verbally.

"I wouldn't call them radical, aside from the sewers we're probably going to be playing by the usual rules. It's amazing how far a little pre-planning can take you."

"How so?"

"Aside from ensuring that our roads are wide enough for foot and cart traffic, we've also strategically placed buildings in desirable locations. The residential area isn't close to any valuable resources or the waterfront – so industrial buildings and workplaces will be kept away from their homes."

"The land beside the docks is very valuable," he agreed, "An area of high economic activity. Many of the major trading companies placed their quarters and warehouses there."

"It's noisy too. I don't imagine many people want to live there."

"They do not. The old townhouses there were converted into businesses decades ago. Some of the ships have started to blow horns to warn people of their approach, and now it's becoming a competition to see who was the loudest of them..."

I found Polemarch rather easy to speak with. Which was odd, given his large size and imposing beard. I had the good fortune of falling under a man who understood what I was trying to do, on some level. Polemarch was an economically minded builder. He commanded a huge portion of the Kingdom's external trade from his ports.

"I feel we've drifted off topic. We need to make a decision on the road. I'd like to arrange something before we depart."

"Yes. I agree. Oh! And before I forget, I'd like to assign a representative to assist you in managing the port."

"The port?"

"Aside from the private businesses that make use of our ports, we also have our own ships that people may purchase space on to transport their wares. Unfortunately, with so much trade and money changing hands, some people will try to take advantage. To solve both problems, we formed a group of people to compose ledgers and to keep an eye on smuggling and crime. We call them list keepers."

Amelie finally decided to speak, "Sir Blackwood has already assigned me to take on some of those responsibilities."

"That's perfectly fine. They won't be staying in your town permanently, at least until traffic to your area increases substantially. Day to day operations may still be managed by you, Lady Amelie. The list keeper will keep in touch with you and Sir Blackwood to make sure that everything is running smoothly."

"I submit to your experience on this matter," I said. It was no surprise that Polemarch wanted someone to keep an eye on us. Having a pirate cove opening under his watch would undermine a lot of trust placed in him by those trading companies.

Polemarch held out his hand, "To the future of Celeste's landing."

I took it and gave him a firm handshake, "To the future."

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We decided that it was safer for me to leave the capital as soon as humanly possible. Emotions were still high amongst the nobles after the court session. Amelie was worried about what they'd try to do. According to her, they weren't beyond murder or framing others to get them out of the way. I had no reason to discount that claim. Some of the language they used in my questioning was violent in nature, if not overtly.

Polemarch and I had decided on a stop-gap measure to build the road between our towns. He would begin by splitting a paved road off from his already existing network, around the hills and seaside cliffs, meeting our side of the road halfway. As we didn't have the men or the money to do the same, our side of the path would simply be a series of stakes and signs leading the way.

It was a scenic route and very tough for a wagon with wooden wheels. Any serious trade would be done over the water. For the smaller farmers and exporters, it was a cheap, if slow alternative to licencing a ship. The Black Cove were an important trading partner. They were growing quickly and demand for a variety of goods was skyrocketing.

Our easy to access raw resources like stone, wood and fur could undercut their prices. For secondary goods I'd need to make a more detailed assessment of what we were making and what the Black Covers were receiving already. On that note – Polemarch had invited me to visit his own castle in a few weeks, both to introduce me to his other vassals properly, and to ask me for a few pointers of renovating the city.

The stand and banner that I had been gifted were placed behind my desk. It was starting to feel like a real mayor's office now. I'd cleaned up some of my charts and stat papers, putting them into more organized binders and drawers which had been generously donated by some of the townspeople. When the town grew it'd become increasingly important for me to keep an eye on those shifting magical numbers. I'd even copied my sewer plans and transformed them into a 'heatmap' to show me where the flow was heaviest.

The eye was incredibly versatile and powerful. I had to wonder where the limits of its power really lied.

For now, I knew that we were secure on food and had more than enough clean water. With the imminent threat of Lunarmarian invasion stemmed by my fealty to Polemarch – we could focus inwards on key issues like trade and housing. Once the roads were complete and boats started visiting, we could move onto more productive activity.

To the future indeed.