
A Late-Start Tamer's Laid-Back Life
Yuu Tanaka
Illustrator:
Nardack
1


A LATE-START TAMER'S LAID-BACK LIFE
Yuu Tanaka
Illustrator:
Nardack
1


A Late-Start Tamer's Laid-Back Life
A LATE-START
TAMER'S
LAID-BACK LIFE
1


Alyssa
Sakura
Olto
Yuto
Rick
Bear Bear

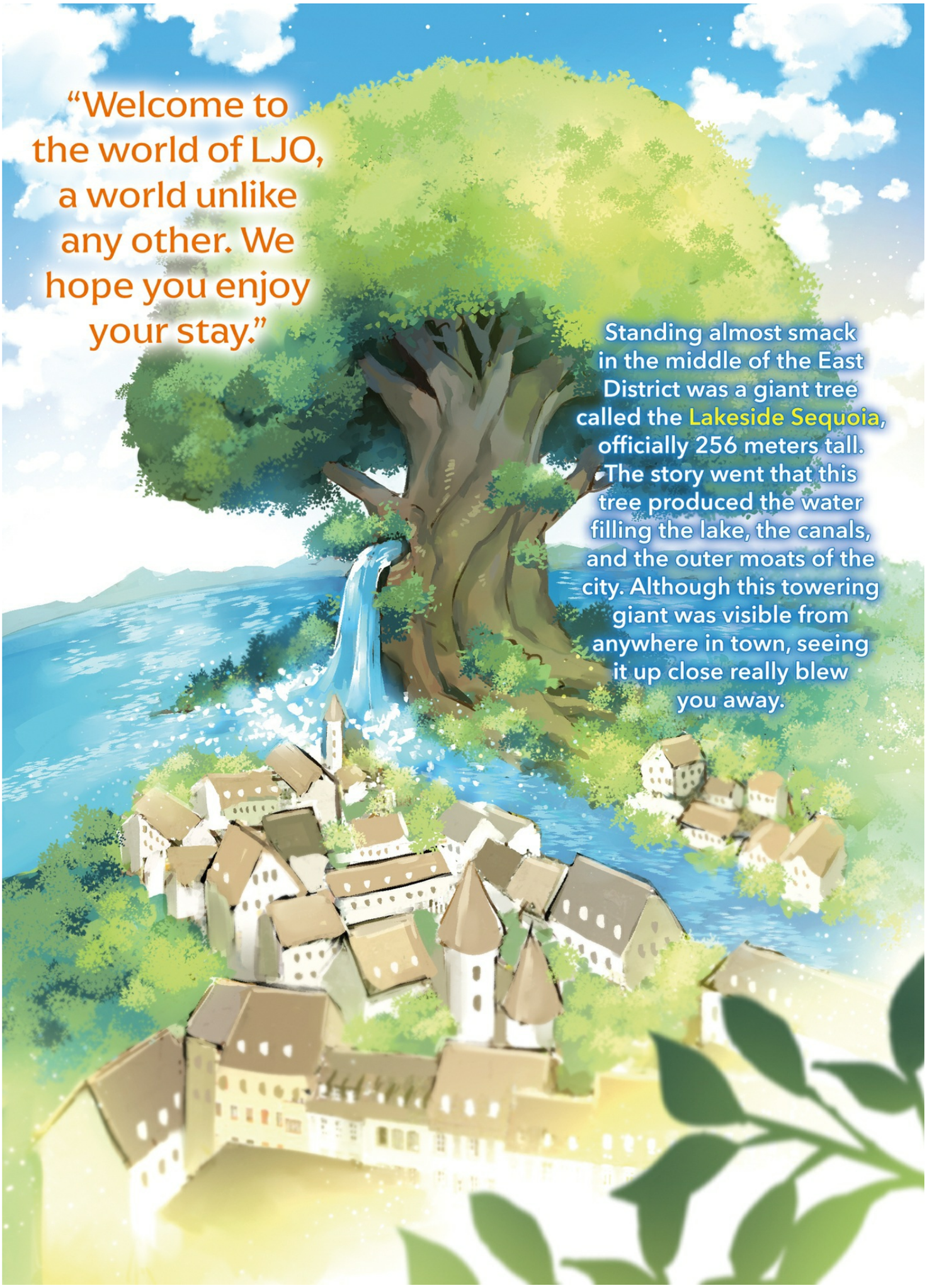

"Welcome to the world of LJO, a world unlike any other. We hope you enjoy your stay."
Standing almost smack in the middle of the East District was a giant tree called the Lakeside Sequoia, officially 256 meters tall. The story went that this tree produced the water filling the lake, the canals, and the outer moats of the city. Although this towering giant was visible from anywhere in town, seeing it up close really blew you away.

Table of Contents

Cover

Color Illustrations

Prologue

Chapter One: Off to the Game World

Chapter Two: Starting Over as a Late Bloomer

Chapter Three: Different Strokes for Different Folks

Chapter Four: Living the Dull Life

Chapter Five: The Lakeside Sequoia Dryad

Chapter Six: New Companions

Epilogue

Afterword

About J-Novel Club

Copyright

CONTENTS

Prologue

Chapter One: Off to the Game World

Chapter Two: Starting Over as a Late-Bloomer

Chapter Three: Different Strokes for Different Folks

Chapter Four: Living the Dull Life

Chapter Five: The Lakeside Sequoia Dryad

Chapter Six: New Companions

Epilogue

Afterword

Prologue

“Skreeeeeonk!”

The enormous, dragon-like lizard unleashed a furious bellow. The boiling lava flowing around us began to bubble more intensely, as if responding to its rage. Sparks flew through the air, glowing like fireflies.

“It’s going berserk...!”

“Grrrr!”

The dragon-esque lizard turned towards us. Rows of sharp teeth lined the inside of its gaping mouth, and I could see the back of its throat starting to glow faintly—a sign that it was about to launch its Fire Breath attack.

“This is gonna be a big one...!”

I could tell by how long it was taking to charge that this would be no ordinary Fire Breath.

“Brrruuung!”

No sooner had I spoken than the lizard—the boss of this battle—exhaled a beam of light from its mouth. This was the monster’s ultimate move: concentrating its Fire Breath into a single point and unleashing it as a scorching ray. If an attack like that were to hit me, I would probably die instantly. However, I remained unfazed.

“Mm-mm-mmm!”

Just before the ray could strike, a small figure leaped into my path.

“Mm-mmm!” the small, green-haired boy hummed.

“Olto!”

This boy was my tamed monster, Olto.

Olto glared at the incoming ray, widening his stance and digging his heels into the ground as if he intended to halt it. However, what he wielded was neither

shield nor weapon, but a hoe. Yes, I'm talking about the kind you use for gardening. It was hardly something you'd consider a battle implement. Regardless, Olto raised his hoe confidently and swung it down at the gleaming beam speeding towards him.

"Mm-mmm!"

The hoe clashed with the scorching ray.

Most people might think, *He won't stand a chance!* but I hadn't a shadow of a doubt.

"You can do it, Olto!"

"Mm-mm-mmm!"

Olto's hoe deflected the ray, scattering it.

"Now *that's* what I'm talking about!"

"Mm-mmm!"

"Time for a counterattack! Sakura, immobilize that bastard!"

"...!"

A girl who was almost too beautiful to be real snapped to attention at my command. True to her name, her hair was the color of sakura—cherry blossom—petals. By appearance, she was older than Olto, perhaps around high school age.

As Sakura thrust out her hands, the earth beneath the lizard glowed, and a giant magic circle appeared, surrounding the beast. Then, the ground split open, and countless vines emerged from the cracks. The vines grew rapidly, wrapping themselves around the lizard's lower body like a snake coiling around its prey.

"Raeeerrrr!"

The creature thrashed about, trying to break free of the vines, but it could not escape their grasp.

"All right! Now it's a sitting duck! Drimo! Rick! Get 'em!"

"Squeak squeak!"

“Chirp!”

Two figures dashed towards the beast, letting out cute little squeaks—my trusty companions, Drimo and Rick.

Drimo was about 120 centimeters in height; taller than Olto, but still a mere speck compared to the immense lizard. His appearance was that of a mole, walking on its hind legs and dressed in navy overalls. A pair of small, round sunglasses perched atop the bridge of his nose, and he wore a yellow safety helmet bearing the words “I ain’t afraid of sunlight.” On his shoulder rested a giant pickax, the size of which no rock would ever stand a chance against.

As Drimo charged fearlessly at the lizard, an even smaller figure ran alongside him. In fact, “small” was a generous way to describe it; *teeny-weeny* was more like it. I’m talking the size of a puppy—no, maybe even tinier.

The tiny, scampering creature was a squirrel. Unlike Drimo, who, being a mole walking on its hind legs, was a bit surreal to look upon, this squirrel looked incredibly realistic. There was no mistaking this was a squirrel. Coloring aside, it looked exactly like the ones you’d see in zoos in Japan.

Looking at Drimo made you feel like you were in a fantasy world, but the sight of Rick, the aforementioned squirrel, brought you back to reality. And yet, either because I was already accustomed to this world, or because these two somehow complemented each other perfectly, seeing them side by side didn’t seem strange at all.

“Get ’em, Drimo!”

“Squeak!”

Drimo shot me a thumbs-up, not even looking back. *Drimo, my man!* Even from a distance, he gave off overwhelmingly macho vibes.

Drimo gained speed now, as though the wind were propelling him, and drove his pickax, now glowing with a red light, smack into the lizard’s nose.

“Ra-Raeeerrrr!”

The creature was clearly in pain from the hit, which the drastic drop in its life meter confirmed.

“Chirp chirp!”

Right after Drimo, Rick launched his attack. He was a frail little thing, far too small in size. Unlike Drimo, he was completely unarmed.

Rick, however, boldly approached the lizard and hurled something tiny at its back—a nut, the size of an acorn, the kind that children often make toys of.

It’d be difficult to imagine that the small nut arcing through the air would inflict any damage on the monster, whose scales were as tough as granite. And in fact, the nut merely bounced off the lizard’s scales ineffectually—or so it appeared.

Booooom!

A massive, inexplicable explosion erupted from the nut. A pillar of flames rose, and a thundering sound drowned out the lizard’s roar. The blast was so powerful it knocked the creature facedown on the ground, rendering it unable to stand.

“Great job, you two!”

“Squeak squeak!”

“Chirp!”

The lizard’s life meter dropped even further.

“Time to finish ’em off! Fau, sing the Song of Glory for Bear Bear!”

“Aye!”

Fau, the girl who’d been perched on my shoulder this whole time, soared into the air with a grin.

She was about the same size as Rick, and a beautiful pair of translucent, bug-like wings grew from her back—a sure sign of a fairy. She was stunning, with her soft, curly red hair and her blue high-cut leotard. Despite the rather racy outfit, however, her diminutive stature and doll-like features lent her an innocent air.

Fau plucked at her fairy-sized lute and opened her tiny mouth.

“La la la...♪” she sang, her voice unmistakably fey.

The sound of the lute and Fau’s sweet singing voice melded together into a

mysterious, somehow sorrowful melody that echoed through the air. As she continued to sing, a wave of light appeared, as though the tune was taking form. It gathered gradually into a single point, moving towards a small figure.

“Growl!”

The frolicking figure in question was a yellow teddy bear, roughly the size of an elementary school student. It was another of my companions, Bear Bear.

“Take ’em down, Bear Bear!”

“Grooowlll!”

Bear Bear let out an adorable but mighty roar, and sharp claws emerged from their teddy bear paws. Their six claws, three for each paw, gleamed like sword blades. Honestly, there was something pretty badass about seeing claws that vicious sprouting from a teddy bear’s precious paws.

Strengthened by Fau’s song, Bear Bear sprang into the air, jumping higher than their own height. Their claws gleaming red, they slashed repeatedly across the lizard’s face.

“*Euurrrggghhh!!!*”

The lizard let out one final, agonized shriek before turning into dust and fading into thin air, its HP fully depleted.

“We did it... Guys, we did it!”

“Mm-mmm!”

“...♪”

“Squeak.”

“Chirp chirp!”

“Aye aye!”

“Grooowlll!”

As I pumped my fist in the air, my tamed monsters shouted in joy and rushed to my side—all except for Drimo, that is, who, despite his fluffy and cute appearance, wasn’t much of one for caring.

“Good job, everyone! We won!”

I patted each of them on the head; they all beamed in return.

Ah, there’s nothing like defeating powerful bosses with your tamed monsters at your side.

“Gaming doesn’t get better than this, am I right?!”

Chapter One: Off to the Game World

Have you heard of a game called LJO—Law of Justice Online?

It was heralded as the first online RPG for full dive VR gaming consoles—every gamer's dream, made a reality three years ago—made exclusively in Japan.

Oh, right. Full dive VR games, by the way, are games where your consciousness gets disconnected from the actual physical world and enters a virtual reality while your body sleeps.

In the beginning, LJO was known as a VRMMO-RPG, the same as other massively multiplayer online RPG games, but its classification has now been changed to VRWCO-RPG, which stands for VR World Connecting Online—continuously online virtual reality—RPG.

The official explanation for this change was that since LJO used full dive VR technology, a new interface, it differed significantly from traditional MMOs and couldn't be classified alongside them; it was a completely new genre, according to the developers.

However, the real reason for this appeared to be that they were swiftly denied use of the term VRMMO, which was already trademarked in various countries.

Of course, the term VRMMO is already one in widespread generic use, so if the developers were to take the matter to court, they would probably be granted permission to use it without much of a fuss. There's no telling how long that process would take, though, so evidently they decided that coining a new term would be a faster and cheaper alternative.

Well, as long as it's fun, I don't really care what they call it.

There were already several games revolving around magic or fantasy worlds on the market, but no other RPG featured world-building this intricate or on such a large scale.

When I first saw the trailer, I was moved by how realistic and natural it

looked. I remember thinking, *Wow, we're really in the future now*. Their tagline, "It's like visiting another world," probably wasn't hyperbole—even if it did sound kind of cheesy.

Whenever new information about the game was released, it was always front-page news on online news sites; that's just how much public interest this game had garnered.

It probably wasn't an exaggeration to say that gamers all over the world were waiting with bated breath for its release. The first batch was only to be sold in Japan, and yet there were over twenty million applications for its initial shipment of fifty thousand. Never mind that its price and monthly fees were extremely expensive—more than double that of most other games.

The high pricing was apparently due to the comparatively few in-game purchase options, so most of the players simply accepted that this was something they would have to deal with.

Incidentally, the only items available for purchase were cosmetic—things related to enhancing your appearance or decorating the inside of your virtual home. The game supposedly made it impossible to obtain power-up items or exclusive equipment to boost your stats via real-world money. That is to say, the amount you spent wouldn't directly affect your overall strength in the game, something that you could say is pretty rare for a current day game.

Obviously, I, Yuta Sasaki, had also entered the presale lottery. And as for the result of that...

"Hell yes!" I yelled, staring at my computer screen. My attention was focused on an email I'd received in my inbox.

Subject: To the Winners of Law of Justice Online

The email was a stilted, formal message that essentially said *thank you for entering the lottery for Law of Justice Online's first presale, you won, ain't that great, blah blah blah*. At the end it provided payment details for the software and a few cautionary notes, such as not to resell the game.

“All right! All *right*!”

This was totally unexpected. The odds had been less than one in four hundred, so though I’d sent in an application for the hell of it, I hadn’t really expected to win.

“Looks like it’s decided.”

What was, you might ask? That it was time for me to play like a true game junkie.

Junkie mode is a playstyle reserved for a select elite class. These players belong to a new human species who believe video game worlds are more important than reality. Abandon all hope, ye who wish initiation into this group. Dost thou vow to devote thyself wholly to gaming? Only those who can answer the gaming gods with a resounding yes are permitted to become game junkies.

To put it simply, game junkies are people who are so invested in gaming that it starts to have severe consequences in their actual lives. Players on the extreme end are said to live off potato chips, use a plastic bottle instead of going to the bathroom, and keep playing until they can’t stay awake anymore. Some people only get four hours of sleep across two days. I’m told that there are people who actually live this way full time—not that I intended to get to that level, obviously.

Full dive VR games were strictly regulated in that aspect lately, anyway. As a result, “playing like a junkie” only meant spending half the day gaming at most.

“Now then, the question is how many days I can take off...”

Today was July 15th. The game was set to officially launch on August 1st.

“Heh heh heh. A glorious boon still awaits me: summer vacation!”

The company I worked at offered a reasonably long summer break to its employees—fifteen days to be exact. If I took paid leave, I could have twenty-five days off in total. That’s a 25-combo streak!

“That loser boss of mine did the same thing last year, so he’s in no place to complain.”

The next day, I eagerly started putting my plan into motion. It was probably

the first time since studying for my university entrance exams that I had worked so hard for something.

After a fierce showdown with my boss, I managed to secure my summer break and paid leave. I didn't feel bad about it; a toxic workplace that can't function without a single twenty-five-year-old rookie could burn in hell for all I cared!

All that was left then were the basic necessities. For clothes, I needed only the bare minimum. There was no need to dress up, since I had no plans of going out. I bought a bunch of underwear, plain white shirts, and shorts from the hundred-yen shop. I intended to live like some kind of rich celebrity, disposing of the clothes every day after wearing them only once.

Next up was food.

I typically cooked my own meals since I lived alone, but while I was in game junkie mode, I wanted to have food that was quick and easy to prepare. That's where the game junkie's savior, frozen meals, came in. Couldn't forget instant foods either. I also bought a ton of prewashed rice. Thankfully, frozen meals nowadays are better for you than you'd think, since they tend to include plenty of vegetables, but I made sure to buy a number of supplements to make up for common nutrient deficiencies. The most important thing while gaming in junkie mode was your health. After all, if you got sick, you couldn't play to your heart's content, even if you had the time.

What else? A heap of instant beverages wouldn't be a bad idea. Coffee, black tea, and green tea should do the trick.

I also intended to use paper plates when eating, so that I wouldn't have to bother washing up afterward.

The last thing I had to take care of was my home.

I lived in a studio apartment close to the station. It was equipped with an air conditioner, so I wouldn't have to worry about the summer heat. I also had a smart bath system, which filled up the tub automatically as long as I remembered to set the timer, so I could easily take a bath every day. The tub had a fresh glazing on it, which meant I didn't have to clean it either. I could skip a meal or two, but as someone who loves taking baths, I couldn't bear the

thought of going without one.

As for cleaning my room... I'd just have to accept that it would be a bit untidy. I decided to set up a robotic vacuum cleaner and an air purifier just in case. I should probably take out the trash once a week, I figured. That was something I couldn't very well avoid.

I ended up buying a state-of-the-art bed as well, which was, believe it or not, made especially for VR games. Besides having a reclining function, it prevented your muscles from atrophying by stimulating them with mild electrical pulses and vibrations. It even helped prevent bedsores by massaging your body; it was the perfect bed for lazy people.

Of course, it wouldn't do to forget to extend my Wi-Fi range. I called the company and was told the upgrade would come in three days, so thankfully, I'd get that done in time.

I also let my family and friends know that I'd be away for a while. I recalled the last conversation I'd had, which was with my mother.

"Hello?"

"Hey, mom. It's me."

"My, look who decided to call us. Hi, Yuta."

"Wait, shouldn't you ask who this is first? What if I was someone trying to scam you?"

"Don't worry, I know it's you."

"Jeez. See, you might think you'd recognize your son's voice when you hear it, but things tend to sound a bit different over the phone. It's dangerous to make a decision like that based on voice alone."

"Recognize it when I hear it...? You really think I love you that much? Bold of you to assume."

"Wha...?! Hey!"

"I knew it was you because of the caller ID, that's all. I may have forgotten what you sound like, but I do remember your phone number."

“I see.”

“So, why did you call? I’m busy too, you know.”

“Busy with what, if I may ask?”

“There’s a rerun of a show that I’ve been looking forward to catching. I have to make a snack to go with it before it starts. Today’s the day I’m going to beat the two-centimeter thickness mark for my fluffy pancakes.”

“I don’t give a damn about your pancakes!”

“And besides, I’ve got to take Fran on a walk.”

“Right. How is Fran?”

“Looking like a white mop as always. But aside from her walks she’s mostly been sleeping on the porch lately.”

“She is pretty old, after all.”

“There weren’t any problems at her last checkup, though. No need to worry.”

“Good to hear... Oh, so about why I called.”

“Finally.”

“I’ll be pretty busy with stuff over the next few weeks, so I won’t be coming home this summer.”

“Are you going on a trip?”

“Something like that.”

“I see. Okay.”

“Uh-huh. Say hi to dad for me.”

“Okey doke. Take care.”

Beep.

“Well *that* was damn short! She never changes. I guess the ‘trip’ part wasn’t exactly a lie, though. I mean, it *is* like vacationing in another world.”

Anyway, that took care of having to deal with people. Perfect! I could now

hole up in my apartment for a whole month.

"Mwa ha ha! My man cave is complete!"

I can't wait for the game to officially start!

Two weeks passed by. Time seemed to crawl until the game's release.

Actually, the two weeks weren't that long, but I just couldn't wait. I couldn't remember the last time I'd lost sleep fantasizing and getting worked up over something like this, but today was finally the day of the launch. I'd be able to dive into LJO in five minutes, to be exact.

My mind kept wandering to the game, which had resulted in several blunders at work the day before, but I didn't care. I was going to begin a new life in a virtual reality. My boss wouldn't get to tell me off until twenty-five days later, and he probably wouldn't be angry by then. At least, I hoped he wouldn't.

"I've already preregistered, and I've got all the deets. I'm ready to go anytime."

I'd been hard at work gathering intel this past week. I'd read the official website through and through, browsed reports from the beta, and tried to get a better picture of the game overall. Beta testing, by the way, refers to a test run that's conducted with a small group of participants before the official launch of a game to make sure there are no significant issues.

It's not as if I wanted to be on the front lines creating walkthroughs or strategy guides or anything, but I had no intention of settling for less either. If I was going to play this game, I wanted to get a strong head start.

That being said, learning too much about the game beforehand would make the novelty wear off and sap the fun out of things. Finding that balance was pretty tricky, so I decided to gather information pertaining to only the following: officially released details; info related to the job class I wanted; stuff related to character building, such as the different types of races; and things to do with the overall setting. In contrast, I didn't look too deeply into the job classes I didn't want, or any hacks uncovered in the beta version. It was impossible to avoid that information entirely, though, so I wasn't wholly

unspoiled.

One of the most important details was how time passed within the game. Apparently, time in LJO passed four times faster than in the real world. I won't go into specifics since it involves complicated technology (something to do with brain signals), but what mattered was that specific ratio. In short, even if I spent four days in the game, only one day would have passed in reality.

The game also limited how long you could stay logged in, and had a sleep requirement for your characters, but I'd work around that somehow. After all, I had no time restraints on my end.

Lastly, the most important thing to know was that LJO didn't allow PKing. PK stands for Player Killing and refers to the act of killing another player to steal their possessions or money. Most games that emulate real-world scenarios tend to come with this option. LJO's system, however, made it impossible for players to kill one another. Not only did it prohibit PKing, there was no mechanic for players to steal from others either. The game was set up in a way that significantly minimized disputes.

This was probably because LJO aimed to create an inclusive environment for all types of players, and they were adamant in their view that their fantasy world was a place for having fun. You could tell they were serious from how they advertised in TV commercials that there would be swift consequences for players who didn't follow the rules. People's opinions were split on this, and some complained online that the LJO team were being too soft or PC, but I supported the decision.

Like, I don't get the point of PKing. As someone who usually plays solo, I was just glad that I wouldn't have to be on the lookout for griefers out to get me. *Why can't we all just get along?* was my philosophy.

In addition, as part of their efforts to include casual players, it was said that LJO would reduce fighting over resources to a bare minimum. They also asserted that they would adjust the frequency of item and monster spawns to prevent strong players from monopolizing hunting grounds, as well as to keep loot from being concentrated in any one area. It probably helped that the lack of in-game purchase options meant that there was no need for the devs to fuel

players' thirst for gambling.

Instead of in-game purchases, rumor had it that LJO was considering selling additional expansion packs for different species and items. I guessed that was how they planned to deal with the whales.

Beep beep!

"Whoops, looks like it's time."

The alarm that I'd set for thirty seconds before launch time had gone off. I turned off the alarm, put on the visor headset, and reclined on my bed.

"Five, four, three, two, one...and start!"

My vision went dark. The next minute, I found myself standing in a dimly lit area. It was a strange place surrounded by a pitch-black darkness that seemed to stretch on forever.

"Whoa, it's exactly how they said it would be. A navigator's supposed to give me a tour any time now..."

"*Welcome to the world of Law of Justice Online.*"

A fairy the size of my palm fluttered down out of nowhere. It was a cute little pixie, similar in design to Tinker Bell. This was likely the navigator, who was going to help me design my avatar.

"*We will now begin building your character,*" said the fairy.

Though it was cute in appearance, the way it talked was robotic, and it lacked any kind of expression. It probably wasn't a very sophisticated AI.

I'd already entered my user information beforehand. I just had to select my username now, and I could get started on designing my avatar.

"*Please enter your username.*"

"Yuto, written in katakana."

I'd used that name for my characters ever since I was a kid, so I stuck with my old standard.

"*Next, we will create your avatar. Would you like to use automated assistance?*"

“Yes, please.”

“*Very well. We will now create your avatar based on your appearance.*”

The avatar that appeared in front of me was a rather attractive and clean-cut male avatar. All I had to do was accept it, and this handsome fellow would act as my standin in the game.

Well, boys, we’d done it. LJO’s avatar creation engine, hailed by some as god-tier, had worked its magic. Since the avatar was modeled after me, his facial features bore a slight resemblance to mine—ignoring the fact that he had silver hair and was twice as good-looking as I actually was.

Since the navigator said that the automated avatars were based on our faces, I could justify my choice by saying, “Well, I guess I’m fine with an automatically created avatar. It’ll save me all the time I would spend on tweaking it.” Even if my avatar was more handsome than myself, if anyone asked, I could truthfully tell other players that this had been the “default.”

I mean, who wouldn’t want to play as a beautified version of themselves? That being said, you didn’t want to spend *too* much time making yourself look good, lest you attract comments like, “Well *someone* sure spent a lot of time in front of the mirror.” This auto-beautifying avatar creation engine easily solved that problem, though. What a godsend.

As for me, I obviously wasn’t going to change anything. I wanted to stick with this good-looking fella, thank you very much!

“*Will you be making any in-game purchases?*”

There were very few items you could actually pay for in this game. Other games often let you buy powerful weapons and armor or obtain new skills, but in LJO, you could only tweak your character’s appearance or change the interior of your home. In short, spending more didn’t equal higher stats.

However, there *was* one single area you could blow your money on, and that was during initial character creation.

At the start of LJO, you had stat points you could distribute to build your character. These points could be purchased with real money, and it cost three thousand yen per five points. Again, opinions were divided on this, but it

seemed like a generous offer for people who had jobs and weren't able to stay logged in for a long time, but didn't want to fall far behind players who had time to figure out all the hacks.

"Definitely gotta buy the maximum number of credits."

Then, you had office workers like me who clearly had no life, but that was what it was. I was *ready* to blow my money on this game. The most expensive bundle was one hundred points, which cost sixty thousand yen. This in-game purchase came with many pitfalls, however, so you could hardly call it generous.

The first downside was that there was a two-hour activation time limit for your purchase. This was supposedly so that the server didn't get overwhelmed, but people theorized that it was to encourage players to spend more money. I'll explain it in more detail later.

Once I had made my purchase, the next step was obtaining bonus points. These points were separate from the points I purchased and were randomly assigned to each character at the start. You could reroll as many times as you liked to get those points. Bonus point amounts ranged anywhere from thirty to one hundred, but as long as I got over sixty, I'd consider myself lucky.

The next screen was where I selected my job class. This was where the second trap awaited. There were over fifty basic job classes, and you were asked to take your pick from one of five randomly selected titles. That meant if you didn't see the job class you wanted, you'd have to start over from the beginning. However...

If I wanted to redo my job class selection, I'd have to go back and obtain the random bonus points all over again. I'd need all the luck I could get if I were to be satisfied with both the number of bonus points and my job class. I had read up on the rare job classes beforehand and wanted one of those; two hours probably wouldn't be enough.

However, after two hours, anything left undecided would be determined randomly, and you'd be logged in to the game with that character. This was announced at the start of the character-building process, and also stated in the terms of use.

You could build your character again from scratch, but to obtain bonus points from your in-game purchase, you'd have to pay again. Talk about a booby trap. Some players would definitely end up making several purchases in order to get a head start in the game. Damn those clever devs!

Because of that, I knew I had to compromise somewhere. I told myself that I'd be satisfied if I got more than 150 bonus points, including the ones from my in-game purchase.

There were two job classes that I was after, and those were Summoner and Monster Tamer. Both job classes were suited for solo players. To be honest, I disliked working in groups, so I intended on playing by myself. I didn't want to have to be sensitive to other people's needs while gaming.

Using magic, summoners had the ability to call forth summoned monsters that they could engage in battle. They essentially fought like the evokers in that famous video game series commonly abbreviated as FF. There were apparently two types of summoning: Instant Summon, which summoned a monster one time without using a party member slot, and Permanent Summon, which summoned a beast as a party member for a longer duration.

Tamers were like Mokémon trainers. They acquired monsters using a skill called Tame and were able to take up to five tamed monsters with them. Tamers couldn't wield as many monsters as a summoner, but because you weren't summoning them with magic, it didn't cost you any MP. However, since tamed monsters got XP as well, those playing in teams tended to avoid Tamers, as it meant there was less XP to go around, leaving it mostly a solo class.

"*All right. Let's get started, shall we?*"

Sixty-six bonus points on my first roll. Not bad.

"*Please choose your job class.*"

"Hmm... Guess I can't expect to luck out on the first try."

The options listed before me were Swordfighter, Soldier, Alchemist, Cleric, and Farmer.

"I'd like to start over," I said.

“*Please wait while we obtain bonus points.*”

Fifty-three points, eh? I supposed it would do.

“*Please choose your job class.*”

This time my options were Woodcutter, Carpenter, Apothecary, Fisher, and Craftsperson. Those were all manufacturing jobs or pure jokes. Time for another redo.

I reselected my job class about fifteen times after that, but the job I wanted had yet to appear.

“*You have thirty minutes left.*”

Yikes. Things were looking bad. Should I aim for fewer bonus points? But to settle for less after coming this far... I decided to keep at it until the last fifteen minutes.

Finally, the moment I’d been waiting for arrived.

At sixteen minutes left on the clock, I managed to roll eighty-six bonus points. Not only that, but the job classes listed on the screen were Archer, Lancer, Mage, Farmer, and Tamer.

“At last, the moment I’ve been waiting for!”

I immediately selected Tamer.

I’d already done my calculations beforehand when I checked the list of initial bonuses on the official website, so I was well prepared. I’d also obtained well over 150 points, which I had considered the minimum amount I needed, giving me quite a bit of leeway.

“*Please allocate your bonus stat points.*”

First, I used ten points to change my race from human, the default setting, to a halfling. This was something I had decided while scouring the internet for information prior to the game. While halflings had less strength and endurance, their dexterity and intelligence were higher, and you got bonus points when you used and nurtured nature skills and command abilities. You could say they were perfect for rearguard tamers. The only caveat was that it apparently changed your appearance a bit, but how so?

“Hmm... Didn’t think I’d be this short.”

My POV lowered instantly. I’m shy of 170 centimeters to begin with, but right now, my avatar was about 150 centimeters, or possibly even shorter than that.

“Looking kind of young there too. Still handsome, though, so I guess I don’t mind.”

Compared to the race-specific advantages I’d get, becoming shorter was a minor trade-off.

“Next, I’ll need to upgrade my starting gear.”

I used twenty points to equip myself with the Beast Tamer Bangle, a Tamer-specific accessory that boosted your monster-taming skills and command abilities. Its defense was only 1, but oh well. According to the players who had selected tamers in the beta test, Monster Taming skills were harder to strengthen than other skills, so items that boosted them were reported to be highly useful, which was why I’d been determined to obtain this one.

“Since I have enough points, might as well upgrade my armor too.”

I next used ten points to upgrade my robe to a silver one and an additional five points to change my staff to an ebony one. I figured this armor was pretty good for starting out.

“Can’t forget to strengthen my skills either.”

I needed to strengthen the most crucial skill for tamers, my Monster Taming ability. It took four points to increase my skill one level. I decided to use sixteen points to level up to level 5, which was the highest I could go with my bonus points. An advanced taming skill meant that my tamed monsters would get bonus points for their abilities, and it would also affect the outcome of my taming actions. It was the most essential ability a tamer could have.

“All right. I think that’s about it for myself.”

I could finally move on to the most vital stage, strengthening my first monster. Jobs like Tamers, Summoners, and Necromancers that involved commanding magical entities were assigned one randomly selected monster to use at the outset, which you could then strengthen by using bonus points.

I first used twenty points to select Advanced Tame, a skill that changed the pool from which your first monster was selected. Usually, you would get one monster from the starting zone, but your monster would be selected from the Zone Two pool if you acquired Advanced Tame. In addition, your monster would gain an extra baseline level. This meant that you could obtain a strong monster from the very start.

Next, I used a further twenty-five points to acquire the skill Special Tame. This was a bonus that ensured the monster you obtained at the start would be a unique specimen. Unique specimens came with a preset name and had improved abilities and skills. Their appearance and skills also varied slightly from default specimens, and the odds of getting one were normally extremely rare. Getting one of those at the start of the game was pretty dope. This skill also had the stacked effect of boosting your monster's baseline level by one.

"Heh heh, don't think I'm done yet."

I then used another twenty points to select Extra Skill. This meant my first beast would acquire a special skill by default. Unlike ordinary level-up bonuses, special skills could typically only be learned by completing special quests. Although you weren't able to choose the type of skill, having a skill that you wouldn't be able to acquire under normal circumstances from the beginning was bound to give me an edge. This bonus *also* increased your skill's base level by one, by the way.

After that, I used fifteen points to obtain Blood Skill.

Tamers had a system where you could breed monsters to create new beasts with the traits of their parents. This offspring would inherit both of its parents' abilities and skills. Blood Skill, however, gave your monster a skill that could typically only be obtained by breeding right from the outset. This was also randomly chosen, but whatever.

The final thing I upgraded was my monster's gear, which supposedly changed depending on what monster you got. Monsters that didn't have any initial equipment were given special gear, while monsters that were already equipped had their gear strengthened. Obviously, I used another fifteen points—the maximum allowed—for this as well.

“Let’s see, that leaves me with thirty points...” I opted to use fifteen of these to increase my starting money from 500 G to 3,000 G.

I wanted to acquire more skills too. You could obtain up to eight skills at the start of the game. At the moment, I only had five skills: Monster Taming, Command, Advanced Taming, Wand Magic, and Cooking, so I chose to obtain the skills Gather, Concoct, and Alchemy in addition. My plan was to make effective use of the items I gathered by concocting potions. Each skill cost five points to acquire.

I was interested in magic as well, but one of the forums mentioned it was better to choose what magic to learn based on what was best suited for your first monster, so I decided to save that for another time.

Incidentally, the Appraisal skill, which was considered a must-have in this type of game, was given to every player unconditionally as a basic attribute, so there was no need to spend points to learn that.

“All right, I’ve used up all my points.”

Perfect. I’d even managed to increase my starting money.

Heh heh heh. Time to kick ass!

“*Would you like to begin the tutorial?*”

The game walked me through a tutorial after that, which turned out to be incredibly easy. All it did was lightly touch upon how to use arts and skills, plus how to craft things. It didn’t even offer any special items for completing it.

Well, now that I’d figured out the basic moves, at least I probably wouldn’t have a hard time in LJO.

“*This is the end of the guided tutorial.*”

“Finally!”

“*Welcome to the world of LJO, a world unlike any other. We hope you enjoy your stay.*”

There was a buzzing, staticky noise as the navigator vanished, and before I knew it, my body was engulfed in a soft light. Taken aback, I reflexively closed

my eyes. Then, I heard the hustle and bustle of people chatting and walking about fill the air, as though I were in town. But it wasn't just the sound. I felt a breeze caressing my skin and even caught a faint whiff of dirt.

"This must be..."

I slowly opened my eyes to find myself standing in an open space paved with red bricks, which was clearly meant to resemble a European town—not that I'd ever been to Europe, but you know what I mean.

A giant clock tower, probably at least twenty meters tall, stood in the middle of the square. This clock tower had an exterior of the same stylish red brick and apparently told the time in the game. The large clock face contained two smaller dials within, which indicated the month and day. According to the clock, it was 3:23 p.m. on January 1st.

"So it's been three and a half hours since the game started..."

Fair enough—I had spent quite a bit of time building my character and walking through the tutorial.

As I stood there looking up at the clock, I could see new players logging in all over the square. It was a curious sight; a pillar of light would arise out of nowhere, and a person would emerge in its place as it faded. I had probably appeared in this square the same way a few minutes before.

By the way, the residents of this world referred to players, who were supposedly adventurers who had traveled to LJO by means of teleportation, as otherworldly travelers.

"Huh. I'm guessing you're my monster?" I said, looking down.

"Mm?" the short figure, who had been standing by my side ever since I logged in, uttered curiously. No doubt it was my first monster.

At first glance, it looked like a dwarf, the kind you read about in fairy tales. It was short—about seventy centimeters in height—had green hair, and wore a rather baggy brown outfit and a green scarf around its neck. It also sported a stylish pair of pointed-toe boots. It had a cute, babyish face, and vaguely resembled a human child, about three heads tall in proportion. As for its gender, I couldn't tell. Because of its height, the standard-size hoe on its back

looked unusually big.

“Hmm, I don’t remember there being any monsters like this. At least, I don’t think I came across any humanoid monsters during my research...”

“Mm?”

“Hang on, I should check my player stats first. Gimme a second, okay?”

“Mmm!”

Although it looked human, it seemed like it couldn’t talk.



“If I remember correctly, I just need to concentrate on it... Whoa!”

All I had to do was think the words “open stats,” and they appeared inside my head. I could evidently open and close windows just by thinking, and even select and zoom as well. Wouldn’t expect anything less from the latest and greatest in VR gaming.

Name: Yuto *Race: Halfling* Base Level: Lv. 1

Job: Tamer / Job Level: Lv. 1

HP: 12/12 *MP: 19*19

Strength: 2 *Endurance: 2* Agility: 4

Dexterity: 6 *Intelligence: 6* Sanity: 4

Skills: Gather: Lv. 1 *Command: Lv.1* Monster Taming: Lv. 5 / Concoct: Lv. 1

Wand Magic: Lv. 1 / Advanced Taming: Lv. 1 / Cooking: Lv. 1

Alchemy: Lv. 1

Equipment: Ebony Staff, Silver Robe, Beast Tamer Bangle

Items: Food Rations x 15, Low-Grade Potion x 1, Simple Concoction Kit x 1, Simple Cooking Kit x 1, Simple Alchemy Kit x 1, Honey Dumplings x 5

Money: 3,000 G / Hunger Status: 100% Full

Guild Membership: Adventurers’ Guild, Magical Beasts Guild

Tamed Monsters (1 / 3): Gnome

Unsurprisingly, the first thing I noticed was the information about my monster.

“So *that’s* what you are, eh...”

“Mm?”

My eyes met with the short figure by my side who was looking up at me. It seemed like this little fella was known as a Gnome.

I thought I’d absorbed most of the information from the beta reports related to initial monsters that the beta Tamer players had compiled, but I didn’t recall anything about gnomes on there. They might have been a new breed that was added to the finalized version of the game.

“Whoops, I should be focusing on my stats right now.”

My strength and endurance were pretty low, but my dexterity and intelligence were high, which reflected the characteristics of the halfling race accurately. I was also properly equipped with the initial gear I’d chosen. The next thing that caught my attention was, of course, my items. Among my possessions were several simple kits for crafting things. It looked like we were given items necessary to use our primary skills in our starting equipment. Although their functions were limited to the bare minimum, they were valuable sources of income at the game’s early stages. They were a true godsend.

Either way, just seeing this screen made me realize that I had indeed logged in to the game.

“Man, I really *am* playing LJO! This is freaking awesome!”

I took a deep breath, trying to calm my rush of exhilaration.

“Breathe in, breathe out...”

As I inhaled, the smell of grass and dirt gently tickled the insides of my nostrils.

“Hell yeah! That’s what I’m talking about!”

I could barely contain my excitement at the game’s realism. This was nothing like the other full dive VR games I had played before. They weren’t lying when they said it would be like visiting another world.

“All right! I’m gonna check out your stats next, okay?” I said to the gnome.

“Mm!”

Name: Olto / Race: Gnome / Base Level: Lv. 5

Master: Yuto

HP: 22/22 *MP: 26*26

Strength: 7 *Endurance: 5* Agility: 5

Dexterity: 9 *Intelligence: 11* Sanity: 9

Skills: Arboriculture, Propagation, Luck, Heavy Bo Staff Skills, Earth Magic, Farming, Digging, Night Vision, Forced Cultivation EX

Equipment: Earth Spirit’s Hoe, Earth Spirit’s Scarf, Earth Spirit’s Garments

So his name was Olto—a preset name, just like the guide had mentioned. That meant he was a unique specimen. He appeared to have received his initial bonuses, so his base level started out at level 5. He also possessed earth magic.

With these stats, we probably wouldn’t have to worry about being wiped out in the nearby starting areas. I was a bit concerned about his weapon being a hoe, but during the Warring States period in Japan, farmers successfully made weapons of those, so surely it would be sufficient in battle.

“Hmm... A gnome, eh?”

Because I had absolutely no other information to go on, I had no idea how he would grow from here.

“Oh well. That just means I have more to look forward to.”

“Mm?” Olto inquired, looking up at me like a small child.

“You’re with me now, Olto.”

“Mm!”

Olto straightened his fingers and raised his right hand in salute in response. Damn, that was adorable. I’d really hit the jackpot.

Now that I’d checked Olto’s and my stats, what would I do next?

As I looked around the square, I noticed all sorts of players. There were already a few that stood out.

“Is that a horse?”

A player with a knightlike appearance sitting astride a white horse was the center of attention. However, no one was exclaiming, “That’s so cool!” or “Wow, a horse!” All I heard was people saying stuff like, “Oh, a horse,” and “Is that a horse or donkey?” I could kind of understand why, though.

The white horse that the knight with purple hair was riding was only slightly bigger than a pony, and on top of that, it had a butt-ugly face. It was presumably a horse, but...I suppose the player’s initial bonuses hadn’t blessed him with a more handsome steed like a thoroughbred.

Another person who caught my eye was a stunning pink-haired girl. She was yelling from a stall in the corner of the square.

“Step right up to Mirei’s Apothecary! We guarantee the best deals around here!”

Her marker indicated she was a player. Wow, so she’d already opened her own shop. That was impressive. However, judging from the way she was shouting herself hoarse, business wasn’t booming.

While I was slightly intrigued, I didn’t feel the need to check out the place right away. I could buy stuff that I needed later on.

“Hmm. Guess I’ll head to the Adventurers’ Guild!”

Visiting the Adventurers’ Guild is one of the first things to cross off your list when playing an RPG. I needed to go check out the available quests. I selected “Map” from my status window, which showed that I was currently in the South District’s Town of Beginnings. The Adventurers’ Guild was apparently located in Central Square.

The Town of Beginnings, which was the starting point in the game, was divided into five districts: North, South, East, West, and Central Square. The North, South, and West districts were almost identical to one another and were said to contain all the same NPC-run shops. The Central Square housed the essential facilities and guilds, and was where most people gathered.

The East District differed a bit from other districts, however, in that it featured an enormous lake and forest in the center. The giant tree by the lakeside, which towered over two hundred meters tall, had become particularly famous before the game officially launched via player screenshots. Gazing up at the tree, which could be seen from the square, probably gave many players the sense that they had truly logged in to the game.

I, too, was filled with a sense of wonder upon seeing that tree, which was larger than anything I'd ever seen in real life. Specialized guilds such as the Aquatics Guild and Forest Guild were also said to be situated near the lake.

"Since I can see the giant tree over there, that way must be east, which means I should head *this* way."

As I walked along the road, I could feel the ground beneath my feet, and I was once more impressed by how realistic everything was, down to the tiniest detail. The townscape before me reminded me of highlight reels I've seen of sightseeing spots in Scandinavia, and the beautiful and antiquated view roused a strange nostalgia within me.

"Now then, I wonder which way the Adventurers' Guild is?"

It was easy enough to follow the map to the Adventurers' Guild. It was a building of impressive architecture, built in the style of a European castle and at least the size of a small school building.

Players were initially registered to the Adventurers' Guild and the guild related to their starting job class. In my case, that would be the Adventurers' Guild and the Magical Beasts Guild, which covered all jobs dealing with monsters such as Tamers and Summoners. Incidentally, players could supposedly join up to four guilds.

While there were no downsides to belonging to more guilds, canceling a guild membership cost 500 G, multiplied by your base level, so it was best to be choosy about your enrollment in the early stages of the game.

"This place is friggin' huge!" I exclaimed as I stepped inside the Adventurers' Guild.

The building's interior was immense—it would easily have been able to house

over a thousand players at any given time. Despite some incongruously fancy decor—it featured chandeliers and ornate carpets—the hall was arranged like a municipal office, with rows upon rows of counters, each with a young receptionist sitting behind them.

“That must be the notice board.”

To the side of the counters was a huge bulletin board with numerous notes posted onto it. Each of those notes was a request from someone.

People who took their role-playing seriously could physically tear one of the notes off of the board to obtain the request information. If you were like me, however, and didn’t care for that type of stuff, you could simply look at the notice board from afar while checking the list of quests from your status menu.

“Hmm, looks like we’ve got a quest for collecting medicinal herbs. Nice. That’s, like, RPG 101.”

Gathering Quest

Description: Gather five medicinal herbs.

Reward: 50 G

Deadline: None

I immediately selected that quest from the list and clicked ‘Start’, which automatically accepted the quest—pretty handy. As someone equipped with the Gather skill, collecting herbs should be like taking candy from a baby. Though I’d yet to test my Appraisal skill, as long as there was a plant within my field of vision, a marker would appear above it to indicate its location regardless.

“Let’s get going then, shall we? Sounds like the Northern Plains would be the place to go.”

While you could choose any of the directions heading out from town as your initial area to explore, the plains in the north and the forest in the south were supposed to be slightly more challenging. The grasslands in the east and the

woods in the west had lower-level enemies and were easier to clear, but the north and south areas were richer in items, and the enemies yielded more experience points. The beta test players had consequently headed immediately in one of those latter two directions and beat all of the stages there, before heading onto the next town. I had half a mind to try that myself.

“All right, this is where our adventure truly begins. Let’s go, Olto.”

“Mm-mmm!”

As I began walking, Olto toddled after me. He really was adorable. I couldn’t wait to make my way through this game with him right by my side.

Olto and I proceeded along a spacious boulevard, built wide enough to prevent congestion from the tens of thousands of players traveling in and out of the town all day. As we continued to walk, an enormous city gate loomed ahead of us. There was apparently no pass required to enter or exit the gate, which made sense; at the end of the day, this was just a game.

“The Northern Plains are right outside that gate. You ready for this?”

“Mm-mmm!”

Olto raised his hoe and struck a valiant pose. That was the kind of attitude I liked to see.

The Northern Plains, which sprawled beyond the gate, were a sight to behold. The clear blue skies stretched high above us, and grass covered the ground like a soft green carpet. I’d seen a view similar to this on a trip to Hokkaido, but this was far more stunning. I suppose it was the artificial nature of the environment that made such impeccable beauty possible.

Still, for a virtual world, it was overwhelmingly realistic. Each blade of grass stood out clearly, and you could even catch a whiff of earth in the air. I felt the dirt and grass underfoot with each step, as if I were walking along an actual riverbank.

The first thing I did was walk around and look for some herbs. It took little effort; I found a green marker floating above the grass almost immediately.

“Well, that was quick.”

I assessed the plant, which was, sure enough, a medicinal herb. Although it only had a one-star rating—the lowest on a scale of one to ten in terms of quality—I'd successfully picked my first plant.

```
Name: Medicinal Herb
Rarity: 1 / Quality: 1★
Effect: Recovers 5 HP. (10-minute cooldown)
```

"Heh heh, this is a breeze. Why don't we slay a few monsters while we're at this?"

I walked around to see if there were any more herbs in the area. The Northern Plains were teeming with other players. There were a few parties nearby already engaged in battles with monsters. The first area in the game was supposed to be pretty spacious in order to accommodate the hordes of new players, but it was still densely packed. There was nothing to fret about, though. Each player had their own designated nodes to gather items from, so if other people collected stuff from the same area, it didn't mean there would be any less for me.

As I expected, however, there were few gathering nodes near the town. I gave the area a thorough once-over, but I couldn't see any other gathering spots nearby.

"I guess we should go deeper in."

I decided to head to the edge of the map, where there were likely to be fewer players. As it stood, there were far too many people walking around where I was for it to feel like a proper adventure.

"Mm, this feels nice."

"Mmm♪," Olto hummed. It sort of felt like we were going out for a picnic.

As Olto and I searched for our next plant, a monster suddenly emerged from out of a grassy thicket.

"Aha! About time!"

I took a good look at the creature that had appeared before us. It was, well, a dog—a large, brown-furred canine. It was definitely something feral, though, and was snarling viciously—you could hardly call it cute.

"This must be a Wild Dog."

The appropriately named Wild Dog was considered the most powerful opponent at the early stages of the game. The recommended level to engage them at was level 3 and above for solo warrior-type classes, and level 6 and above for solo crafter types. There was only one of it, though, versus two of us. Furthermore, Olto was a level 5 unique specimen. There was no way we'd lose.

"Okay. Olto, time to show us what you've got! Go get 'em, tiger!" I commanded.

"Mm-mm! Mm!"

Olto yelled enthusiastically in response. That was the spirit.

Now then, how would Olto go about attacking this beast? I was pretty confident he would use earth magic, but...would he instead go the simple route and throw pebbles? Sprout thorns beneath the enemy's feet? He might even take the creature by surprise by opening a pit trap.

All right, time to see what earth magic can really do!

"Mm-mmm!"

Olto, however, completely shattered my expectations.

"Mm-mm-mm-mm!"

He charged at the Wild Dog and began throwing punches.

Whoosh!

"*And* he missed?!"

Olto's fists whiffed the air as the Wild Dog casually sidestepped his blows.

Wait. What happened to his earth magic?

"Mm!"

"*Again?!* Come on, dude, use your magic!"

“Mm-mm...” Olto grumbled.

“Huh? Why are you shaking your head?”

Before I knew it, the Wild Dog was standing right in front of me.

“What the?! No, wai—”

“Grr!”

“Aaaah!”

It *bit* me! The dog sunk its sharp teeth straight into my leg. I felt a forceful impact, but the pain was fairly mild. Phew. Thank goodness this was just a game.

Wait, no, I had way more pressing things to be worrying about right now!

The bite had taken about twenty percent of my health meter. It was likely my Silver Robe that had protected me from taking any more damage despite my low stats. Even my legs, which weren’t covered by my robe, were somehow protected, thanks to the game mechanics.

“Olto, hit this thing with some magic already! Ugh, get away from me, damn it!”

I swung my staff at it, but I wasn’t strong enough. Even though I was sure I’d gotten a clean hit, more than ninety percent of the Wild Dog’s HP still remained.

“Mm-mmm!”

Olto still seemed to be sticking to hand-to-hand combat.

“Could you maybe use that big-ass hoe you’ve got on your back?!”

“Mm...”

Olto shook his head vigorously. It looked like that wasn’t an option. Were hoes not made for battle? Were they exclusively for farming purposes?

“Use magic then!”

“Mm!”

That, too, garnered a head shake from Olto. It seemed like nothing was going

to convince him to use his magic.

“Damn it!”

I frantically flailed my staff over and over again, but it hardly did any damage. As if just to prove how futile my actions were, the Wild Dog countered my attack with a bite. That alone reduced my HP to half. I was doomed if I kept this up.

“I-I’ve got it!”

If I remembered correctly, Wild Dogs were one of the monsters that could be tamed! Yup, it looked like I was able to select it. It’d be a reliable ally if I could get it under control!

“Tame!”

“Grrr!” the beast growled.

“Gah! Knew that wouldn’t work!”

The stronger an enemy monster was, the lower the probability of successfully taming it, though as their HP fell, that probability rose. However, my chances of successfully taming a Wild Dog that was stronger than me and had a nearly full health meter were slim to none.

“Let’s get out of here, Olto!”

“Mm!”

Defeated, we ran away from the Wild Dog with our tails between our legs. As we ran, I opened my status window, selected the single low-grade potion I had in my inventory, and drank it.

“Phew!”

Once the potion was consumed, the bottle disintegrated into particles of light and disappeared. With this, my health meter was fully restored. Now I could endure a few more blows.

“O-Okay. Let’s head back to tow—Yikes!”

“Grr!”

Another Wild Dog jumped out from the bushes in front of us. Apparently,

moving enough of a distance across the battlefield could trigger another spawn of the same type of monster.

“N-No way!”

“Grrr!”

“Eek!”

I yelped as the Wild Dog mowed me down. Crap, I needed to get away from this thing! I tried to shove the creature off me and get to my feet, but to no avail. Damn it, there wasn’t enough strength in these arms!

“Grrr!” The dog snapped and growled at me.

“Jeez! Lay off already!”

Just then, the Wild Dog from before caught up to us, and it sank its teeth right into my neck.

“Ouch...! Wait, it doesn’t hurt? Tingles a bit. Damn it, though, devs, do you realize how many kids this would traumatize?!”

Being bitten by two large beasts was honestly a terrifying ordeal. Even the insides of their mouths were replicated to the last detail; it was almost enough to start fostering a genuine hatred of dogs in me.

“Mmm!”

“Grr!”

“Mm-mm!”

Oh no! Olto was trying his best to pull the creatures off me, but they sent him flying. With no one left standing in their way, the Wild Dogs chomped at my neck again.

“Yeesh! Your breath stinks!”

With that, several seconds later, my HP plummeted to zero.

My vision went dark instantly, and I felt a floating sensation, like I was riding an elevator. The next thing I knew, I was back in the familiar square with the giant clock tower, the one I’d first arrived in upon logging in to the game.

“...Shit, looks like I respawned.”

It seemed like others could tell I had died from the way I reappeared. Some were even visibly laughing at me.

All of that left me drained... I needed a break.

“I think I’ll log out for now,” I sighed.

In the Town of Beginnings, you could log out of the game simply by sitting on a bench. Unless you set them on your home screen or something, your tamed monsters apparently disappeared along with you.

“Well, catch you later then.” I bid farewell to Olto.

“Mm!”

I plonked myself down on a bench a little ways from the square, and willed myself to log out.

“...This sucks!” I exclaimed, removing my VR visor and getting up from my bed. The clock showed that only about an hour had passed since I logged in. “At least there’s no death penalty yet.”

In LJO, you could respawn up to three times without any death penalties, which was a great bailout for beginners. From the fourth time onwards, though, you’d lose ten to thirty percent of your in-game currency upon starting over, and one to three items from your inventory. Your stats would also be halved, though they would gradually recover over time, reaching full again once half a day had passed within LJO.

Still, I never dreamed that I would end up losing one of my lives this early in the game.

Where did I go wrong? It was probably because I didn’t bother to confirm Olto’s combat strength, which was apparently lower than I’d thought. I’d just seen his high base level and long list of skills and gotten cocky.

“I need more information,” I said to myself as I started up my computer, munching on the sandwich I’d made earlier that morning. I clicked on one of the LJO-related websites I’d saved to my favorites, which contained all sorts of

information about tamed monsters. It was written by Amimin, a player who had been one of the top Tamers during the beta-testing phase.

“Hmm, don’t see anything about gnomes on here.”

The page I was currently viewing listed the monsters you could obtain at the start of the game, which were ranked in order based on Amimin’s analysis of their abilities. However, I couldn’t find gnomes anywhere on that list.

“Let’s see... Ah, here it is.”

I found what I was looking for on the page regarding monsters you could obtain from Zone Three. Since I had chosen to acquire Advanced Tame as one of my initial bonuses, my first creature should have been selected from the pool of monsters from Zone Two; Zone Three wasn’t supposed to be included. As I continued to peruse the page, however, I learned that gnomes had only been exclusive to Zone Three during the beta test, which meant that the developers must have changed it so that they’d also appear in Zone Two with the official launch. That would explain how I’d obtained Olto as my first monster.

The description for gnomes was brief. They were described simply as a monster specialized in making things. A closer look at the fine details told me that gnomes were ill-equipped for battle too. Most of the skills that they’d learn from leveling had to do with mining or farming. The Heavy Bo Staff Skills they started with could only be activated when using pickaxes, shovels, or some hoes, and they weren’t capable of learning any earth magic that was geared towards combat. On the other hand, the page did state that they were highly skilled as farmers, and that their horticulturist abilities were comparable to mid-ranking crafting classes.

“Damn it, I didn’t ask for a *garden* gnome...!”

The website also recommended players “get one after the midway point in the game, along with a plot of land.”

“But Amimin, I got one on my first try...”

Man, I’d screwed up big-time! I’d been banking on having my monster fight my battles for me, so I hadn’t bothered to acquire any combat skills of my own. My character was a flimsy, paper-thin weakling.

“Should I start over...?”

I spent a while contemplating remaking my character. I still had funds from my winter bonus, so I didn’t mind spending money on the game again. If anything, that would be the smartest choice. My character was a complete joke at the moment.

“But...”

Something about the idea didn’t sit well with me. Money wasn’t the issue here; it was that redoing my character build felt like admitting defeat. Was I really going to discard the avatar which I’d spent so much time building, just like that?

Besides, even though we’d just met, Olto would disappear too. An image of the cute little gnome saying “Mm!” and waving at me flashed through my head.

“That’s right, I’d have to say goodbye to him.”

That thought helped me make up my mind more quickly than I expected.

“I’m going to stick with this character.”

To hell with getting a head start and being in the lead. I would survive and enjoy the world of LJO with the character I built: Yuto the Tamer, and his trusty companion, Olto!

“All right! Let’s do this!”

Now that that was decided, I needed to figure out how to make use of my gnome’s characteristics.

Amimin’s website praised gnomes for their horticultural skills. Indeed, Olto’s skills had mostly to do with farming, such as Digging, Farming, Propagation, Arboriculture, and Forced Cultivation EX. When I compared Olto’s stats to that of a regular gnome, it became abundantly clear how high his aptitude for farming was.

Regular gnomes only possessed the following skills to start: Heavy Bo Staff Skills, Earth Magic, Night Vision, Digging, Farming, and Propagation. Arboriculture was a special skill that Olto had acquired due to being a unique specimen. Forced Cultivation EX was probably something he had obtained from

the Extra Skill bonus I selected when building my character, and Luck was presumably a bonus from Blood Skill. In addition, it said that regular gnomes had brown hair; Olto's green hair was proof that he was a unique specimen.

Learning from my earlier mistakes, I took the time to double-check Olto's skills.

Heavy Bo Staff Skills: A technique that involves swinging around heavy staffs. For gnomes, this skill is only applicable to construction and farming tools.

Earth Magic: Magic that draws power from the earth. Gnomes only learn spells related to farming, and are incapable of learning combat magic.

The preceding monster encounters had given me a bit more insight into these, although I should have read up on them sooner.

Night Vision: The ability to see in the dark as though in daylight.

Digging: A skill used for mining or digging in the ground.

These two were exactly as I'd expected. They were skills that came in handy during mining in caves, and were telling of gnomes' aptitudes.

Farming: Grants bonuses to all farming activities. A skill required for agriculture. Each bonus is relatively small, given that this is an all-encompassing skill.

Propagation: A skill that reverts plants to seed form in

order to increase that plant's numbers. The yield and the extent to which the quality will deteriorate are subject to your propagation level.

Arboriculture: A skill required for cultivating trees. It is also possible to grow saplings from nuts with this skill in exchange for a downgrade in quality. The growth rate and the extent to which the quality will deteriorate are subject to your arboriculture level.

Forced Cultivation EX: Speeds up plants' growth rates significantly and slightly improves their quality. Only applies to plants that you are cultivating yourself.

Luck: Boosts your luck in all sorts of situations.

The explanation for Luck was rather vague, but the site predicted that it would increase your odds of obtaining rare items or enemy drops, as well as your chances of success when crafting things.

Right, these *were* all skills specializing in agriculture. If I wanted to make effective use of them, it was probably best to grow crops. The one silver lining was that I'd acquired the skills Concoct and Alchemy. If I used Olto's abilities to cultivate medicinal herbs and concocted potions to sell I could probably make a bit of money.

"I can do delivery-type quests to gain the experience points I need to level, and make money crafting things."

It would be smart to double-check the information regarding Tamers too. One of the signature features of Tamers was obviously their ability to tame—a skill that made it possible for them to command and control magical beasts. To be fair, the Tame skill could be used by other job classes as well, and was obtainable by allocating the bonus points acquired through leveling up.

However, the unique part about Tamers was that they had a skill specific to them called Monster Taming, which improved your success rate, boosted your tamed monsters' stats, and helped you obtain additional monster slots.

While the skill Command, which other professions could also learn, had the same effects, the effects of Monster Taming and Command stacked with each other. This meant that if you learned both skills, it would create a synergistic effect that would significantly increase your success rate at taming, along with your monsters' abilities.

The downside of being a Tamer was that since your monsters also took a share of all gained experience points, you'd end up receiving less individual XP overall, so it was no surprise that people playing in parties tended to steer clear of Tamers. It was a job best suited for solo players. To make up for that, Tamers supposedly required less XP to level up than other jobs, though since the class's base stats were already low, even leveling up did not provide a great increase in strength. It was a weak class despite being geared towards solo players—no wonder it was unpopular.

Things might be different if you possessed outstanding playing skills, but...I wasn't a pro martial artist in real life, nor did I have any unique abilities that sped up my brain's processing speed. I was nothing but an out-of-shape office worker.

I recalled the Wild Dogs' movements.

"Nope, I *cannot* fight those guys!"

Pulling off a close-quarters battle with my low Tamer stats would be incredibly unlikely.

My path suddenly felt fraught with danger. Was this a lost cause? No, what was I saying? I told myself that I'd stick to being a Tamer, remember?!

When in doubt...

"Okay, coffee time. Gonna need a breather before I head back in there."

After two hours had passed within the game, I logged in once more, waking up on the same bench I had used to log out.

“And here’s Olto... Good.”

“Mm...”

“What’s up, buddy?”

“Mm-mm...”

Olto kept on bowing his head as if in apology.

“Are you apologizing for our previous battle?”

“Mm.”

Olto lowered his head further in reply.

“That was my fault. I should’ve assessed your strengths and weaknesses properly before rushing into battle.”

“Mm-mm-mm.”

“You don’t have to apologize anymore.”

I was the one at fault here, yet Olto continued to shake his head to and fro as if to say he was to blame.



At this rate, this would turn into a never-ending apology battle.

“In that case, what do you say we let bygones be bygones?”

“Mmm?”

“Capisce?”

“Mm!”

Olto nodded his head deeply to show he understood, and patted me on the knee. I suppose he was trying to cheer me up.

“Thanks. Now then...nothing amiss with my stats so far. Oh wait, it looks like I’m getting a bit hungry.”

If your hunger status reached zero, your stats dropped, and you ended up taking damage over time, so it was important to stay full by eating food in the game.

“I think my initial items included some food rations.”

The ration that I picked out from my inventory resembled a basic energy bar.

“Looks tasty enough,” I said, taking a bite out of it.

“Blegh!”

From the ration’s appearance, I had expected a sweet flavor, but it was absolutely tasteless.

“This texture... It’s like eating chalk.”

On top of that, my hunger status had only recovered twenty percent. *Shit*. My heart sank at the thought of having to eat any more of this stuff.

“I need to get my hands on other types of food, fast.”

Like, ASAP. Tamers did have Cooking skills for preparing food for their monsters, so in theory I could make better-tasting food as long as I had the right ingredients.

“Oh, that reminds me, you should eat too. Here, take this.”

“Mm!”

I presented Olto with some honey dumplings. These were included in Tamers' starter packs and were meant for monsters. Although Tamed monsters didn't require sleep, they had to eat once a day to prevent their stats from dropping. That was definitely something not to overlook.

"M'kay, shall we get going? You might not be able to fight, but there are still plenty of other things you're good at, after all."

"Mm?"

According to the research I did on farmlands while I was offline earlier, there was an agricultural district on the outskirts of the South District of the Town of Beginnings. On the map, it looked like a large empty tract.

"Wow, there's nothing but fields for miles and miles."

"Mmm!"

Upon arriving, we were met with an expanse of farmland. Few players had bought land at this stage of the game, though, so it was still mostly acre after acre of bare and untilled brown soil. If I bought a plot of land here, I could actually start cultivating plants. The Farming skill would be sufficient to achieve something the level of at least a humble vegetable garden.

So obviously, I was here to buy some land.

"That must be the Farming Guild."

A building that was fairly large, though not so large as the Adventurers' Guild, stood in the middle of the farmland. In contrast to the Adventurers' Guild's stone castle facade, this was a plain wooden building.

The sign at the entrance stated that this was indeed the Farming Guild. It seemed like we were at the right place.

"Never thought I'd visit the Farming Guild before the Magical Beasts Guild."

As I entered the building, I was greeted with a layout similar to that of the Adventurers' Guild. Unlike the other guildhall, however, the interior was furnished with the same wooden material as the outside, and gave off a much more laid-back impression. While it was lacking in glitz and glamour, there was something about it that put you at ease.

“Excuse me. I’d like to buy some land,” I said to the old NPC guy sitting behind the counter.

“Well well, how nice of you to come. I see you’re not a member of our guild, though, young fella. Ya can’t buy land unless you join, understood?”

Right, that probably went without saying. I would most likely be frequenting the guild from now on, so it was best to become a member.

“Okay, sign me up.”

“You got it. Place your status window right here, my boy.”

“Yes sir.”

I opened my status window, and Gramps started pressing some buttons behind the counter. As soon as he was done, I heard a ping, and the Farming Guild was added to my list of guild memberships.

“That’s it for registration. The quest notice board is that way, and reception is over there.”

That didn’t take very long. Oh well, I *was* inside a game, so it’s not like I was expecting to fill out any forms.

“Um, I’d like to buy some land now, if you don’t mind.”

“What grade do you want?”

“Grade?”

“Yep. The soil quality and facilities change depending on which grade ya choose.”

The old man brought out a map and explained in more detail. Since there weren’t that many agriculture-focused players yet, I would likely be able to buy any plot of land that I wanted. He also told me that he could upgrade my field for a fee. That was good to know. I needed to consider my options carefully.

The cheapest plots started at 2,000 G per acre. Depending on the upgrade, prices went up to 3,000, 6,000, and 10,000 G, although 10,000 G was out of the question. The most expensive upgrade apparently came with a small barn-like shed, but it was way over my budget.

The cheapest plot of land was a regular field with no extra bells and whistles. The soil was poor in condition though, which slowed down the growth rate of crops and decreased their quality. As I was considering taking up farming seriously, this would prove impractical.

“I can’t afford 6,000 G either...which leaves me with the 3,000 G option.”

Still, I was floored by the difference. The field that cost 6,000 G was far superior, which was fair given that it cost twice as much, and the soil was supposed to be excellent, which improved the crop yield greatly. In addition, the old man said he would drill a well in it for first-time customers, which I found appealing.

“The 6,000 G option is definitely way better, but...”

I only had 3,000 G on me at the moment. Guess the 3,000 G grade was my only choice...

“No, hold up.”

Was I going to settle for less after making it this far? Hadn’t I made my decision to live as a farmer-type Tamer, and if so, shouldn’t I buy the 6,000 G plot of land, even if it was slightly out of my reach?

“I’m short 3,000 G.”

That was quite a sum of money, but it wasn’t as if I lacked the means to raise it. It was just a matter of selling what I didn’t need to get more cash.

“Do you mind waiting a bit?”

“Sure thing,” the old fellow replied. “But remember, these are first come, first served. The good stuff might be gone before ya know it.”

“I’ll hurry back as soon as I can. By the way, do you know where the nearest item shop is? Or it can be a weapon shop—either one is fine.”

“Well, there’s a general store just north of this street. They mostly deal with farming tools, but I’m pretty sure they’ve got some medicine and weapons as well.”

“Thanks so much!”

I thanked the old man and took off running. Olto kept up with me on his short legs without any problem. If anything, he seemed faster than me—proof that his agility level was higher than mine.

There was indeed a store where Gramps said it would be. It had a distinctive appearance, resembling a good old-fashioned penny candy store at first glance. I rushed inside. The interior turned out to be pretty cramped. There were very few items on display, and only a single counter.

“Welcome,” said the old lady working at the counter.

“Excuse me, I’d like to sell some items,” I said.

“Of course. What would you like to sell?”

Let’s see, which of my items were sellable...?

“How about this?” I asked, placing my ebony staff on the counter.

“A moment please.”

I’d obtained the staff with my initial bonus points. While it lacked special powers, it helped boost my magical abilities. Still, it didn’t change the fact that I was a loser, so I was better off selling it for some extra cash to fund my farm.

“I can buy this for 1,050 G, if you like.”

Hmm, I still had a long way to go to reach my goal. With that in mind, the next thing to sell would be...

“*You are about to remove your body armor*,” the game warned. “*Would you like to proceed?*”

“Do it.”

The next item I handed over was my silver robe, likewise obtained with my initial bonus points.

Even without my gear, my avatar was fully clothed in a beige-colored outfit. It was a sleeveless tunic consisting solely of a single piece of cloth, with an opening for the head. It resembled the clothes ancient folks wore in history textbook illustrations.

“So I’m not naked underneath. Thank goodness.”

I suppose it was to be expected, since this game was meant to be family friendly, though it should go without saying that the clothes had zero defense.

“I can buy this for 2,180 G.”

That came to a total of 3,230 G. I had met my goal! That was a relief; I didn’t want to resort to selling my Beast Tamer Bangle, which enhanced Olto’s abilities.

“I’ll sell them both!”

“Very well.”

As the storekeeper put away my items, I heard a *ka-ching*. I checked my status window to find that my in-game currency had increased to 6,230 G.

“All right! I can buy a farm now! Let’s go, Olto!”

“Mm-mm!”

I started sprinting again with Olto in tow, rushing back to the Farming Guild posthaste.

“Excuse me! I’d like to buy some land!”

“Okey-dokey. So, which plot will it be?”

“I’d like somewhere that’s close to the square, and easily accessible from both the Adventurers’ Guild and Farming Guild.”

“Gotcha. I’d recommend this spot then.”

The old guy pointed out his recommendation on the map. It certainly did look like the ideal location.

“Okay, I’ll take it. And I’d like the 6,000 G grade, please.”

“You got it! You’re sure this is what ya want, yeah?”

My status window launched automatically, and a mini pop-up asked me to confirm my selection one last time. I heard another *ka-ching* as I sounded out the word ‘yes’ in my head, which left me with 230 G. It appeared that the transaction was complete.

“Here, I’ve circled the place for ya on the map.”

I see. So it wasn't like he was going to show me the way there personally. Oh well, as long as I followed the map I figured I wouldn't get lost, so no biggie.

"Um, do you know where I can get seeds for my farm?"

"You can get them right here."

"Mind if I see what you've got?"

As the words left my mouth, it dawned on me that I might not have enough money. Luckily, the two types of seeds the old man showed me only cost 100 G per packet.

"These are seeds for edible grass and seeds for salve-making plants. That's 200 G for both of them."

I bought two packets, each containing five seeds, for 100 G a piece. The seeds would grow into edible grass, which was the main ingredient for food rations, and herbs for making medicine. Medicine was a rung below potions and were only used in the early levels. While they were only half as effective as low-grade potions, they supposedly came in handy for beginners.

"That leaves me with 30 G. I might as well buy something and use it up."

If I could actually afford anything, that is. That was when I noticed the fertilizer.

"What's this?"

"You can get bonus points for cultivating plants if ya sprinkle this in the fields. The effect lasts for five days."

"Is that so? I'll take it then."

"Right-o, that'll be 30 G per acre. There ya go."

I'd managed to use up all of my money. I was now utterly penniless, and it was only my first day. What was I thinking...?

Nah, that just made things all the more exciting!

"Let's head over to our farm, shall we?"

"Mm-mm!"

The plot of land really was right beside the guild, and it took less than five minutes to get there. Although it was still only one little patch, it was without a shadow of a doubt ours to call home.

“I’m counting on you, Olto.”

“Mm!”

Olto thumped his chest in reply. This time his gesture was unmistakable. He seemed to be saying, *Leave it to me!*

In this game, you could grow up to a maximum of twenty crops per acre in your field, though some crops required two or more slots to grow. Perhaps it was more accurate to say you had twenty available slots per acre.

At the moment, I had ten seeds in total: five edible grass seeds and five salve-making plant seeds. That was only enough to fill up half of my allotted land.

“I know. Maybe we can plant this?”

I picked out the medicinal herb from my inventory, the sole trophy from my earlier encounter with death. It would probably be pretty convenient if I could grow them on my farm.

Olto took the plant from my hand, then closed his eyes and began humming.

“Mm-mm-mm... Mmm-mm-mmm...”

Okay, so what now?

Several seconds later, there was a small poof, and the plant Olto had been holding disappeared; it had literally gone up in a puff of smoke. In its place, two black seeds now sat atop Olto’s small palms.

According to my assessment, the seeds were in fact medicinal herb seeds.

“Wow! So that’s the Propagation skill, huh?!”

Plants reverting right into seeds—a fascinating sight that could only be enjoyed within the realm of the game.

“Mm, mm-mm...”

Olto continued to mutter as though reciting an incantation, and the dirt near our feet rose—earth magic? Olto then proceeded to plow the soil with his hoe.

“Are you making mounds?”

“Mm!”

Olto used his finger to poke holes in the mounds he had just built and carefully sowed the seeds he had just propagated. After that, he covered them with soil and patted the earth gently, then drew some water from the well and sprayed them.

There was nothing magical about this at all. It was just regular farming.

I was a bit worried about how things were going, but I told myself to have faith in Olto’s farming skills. Just then...

“What the—?!” I yelped.

“Mm?”

“Sorry, didn’t mean to surprise you. But seriously, they’re sprouting already?”

“Mmm.” Olto puffed out his chest with pride.

I patted Olto on the head, but my eyes were glued to the ground. Almost instantly after Olto sowed them, the seeds had sprouted, much to my amazement. No seed could ever grow that fast. In fact, the farmers’ bulletin board I’d just seen said that it’d take at least twenty-four hours for seeds to sprout after being planted. But this had happened instantaneously. How could it be?

“Did you do this?”

“Mmm.”

Olto stood there proudly. So it *was* his doing. Either his farming skills were super advanced, or his Forced Cultivation EX ability was more potent than I’d expected. Or, he’d done something using his earth magic.

Whatever the case, it seemed like farming would go swimmingly as long as I had Olto. Knowing that we could get a process that normally took twenty-four hours done in seconds was giving me much more hope.

“Hell yeah, I’m getting stoked!”

I needed to plant more crops immediately. Unfortunately, I didn’t have any

more money.

“Should I go and collect some more?”

Wait a minute. It was then that I realized something.

I still had two unpenalized chances left to respawn. I could just gather as many plants as possible. Even if I did die, my items weren’t going anywhere. Even better, it was a fast track back to town! I could death-warp two more times without incurring any penalties. The fear of being bitten to death by Wild Dogs still lingered, but I was determined to accomplish my goal.

Before I attempted something so outrageous, however, I had to gather information. I decided to ask the old man at the Farming Guild what kinds of plants I could grow on the farm for starters.

“You can grow anything you like, depending on the level of your Farming skill!”

With Olto’s ability, we would likely be able to cultivate most plants found around here. That settled things. Time to go on a whirlwind grass-picking, respawning tour.

“Olto, I’m leaving you in charge of this patch. I’m going to collect some plants.”

“Mm-mm!”

[Gather ’Round Tamers] LJO Tamer Megathread

Share the deets on new tamed monsters, show off your companions, etc.—this thread is for everyone!

Bad-mouthing other Tamers is not permitted.

Avoid double-posting.

Be mindful of what you post.

29: Amelia

Name one monster better than my cutie Bun Bun!

I feel like I could get lost in that fluff for hours...

I know for sure that everyone’s staring at me when I’m playing with Bun Bun in the field in the square...

30: Ivan

Easy. My buddy Snake’s scales are the smoothest thing you’ll ever touch.

Doesn’t seem to make me very popular with the ladies, though...

31: Ursula

Not surprising. Some people don’t like snakes very much.

32: Ivan

I figured as much. But no matter. That just means I get Snake’s scales all to myself!

33: Amelia

I don’t mind snakes, I’m just way more into fluffy animals.

34: KingOysterMushroom

>32

Lonely much? lolol

35: Ursula

>32

I’m sure your day will come XDDD

I gotta say, though, your username sounds like you’d be a great undercover agent lol.

36: Ivan

Thanks. Snake and I are gonna tough it out in this big wild world together. But maybe I’ll add something furry to my entourage next.

I gotta level up my skills first, though. I tamed a Rock Ant at the start of the game and I’m already out of slots!

37: Amelia

You didn’t use your initial bonus points to level up your Monster Taming skill?

38: Ursula

It’s possible that they didn’t have enough bonus points if they used them up on something like crafting.

39: Ivan

>37

I didn’t, because I decided to mess around with Swordplay and Magic and Crafting... Anyway, I’m a student so I’m F2P (;_;)

In-game purchase bonuses? Never heard of em!

40: KingOysterMushroom

I don’t think it’s a bad idea to acquire a Magic skill. After all, the usual setup for Tamers is to have their monsters in front while they bring up the rear.

I also think acquiring Crafting is a smart move since it gives you a little extra XP, plus it’ll help you earn money.

Depending on which race you belong to and how you allocated your stats, Swordplay might be useful as well.

The issue is that you’ll probably end up half-assing everything you do until you get all your levels up to par.

41: Eulenspiegel

Guys!!! I saw a monster I’ve never encountered before in the Town of Beginnings! Wonder what it is...

42: Amelia

Oh?

43: Ursula

Details, please.

44: Eulenspiegel

I was strolling through the Town of Beginnings just now, and I spotted a beautiful boy plowing the fields!

45: Ivan

A boy...? Like, a *child*?! That’s weird, man. Or was it like a cross-dresser or something?

46: Ursula

You should know that the no-harassment rule applies to NPCs too, Eulenspiegel. Though admittedly there’s probably some things people will let slide depending on your own gender, lol.

47: Eulenspiegel

Okay hang on, listen!

This wasn’t just some random little boy! He was tiny, and dressed like a fairy-tale dwarf.

48: KingOysterMushroom

I mean, this *is* a fantasy setting, so that’s not that weird. Do you have any screenshots?

49: Eulenspiegel

I don’t. I tried to get a sneaky snap, but it seemed like the farm was set as the player’s home, so the shutter was disabled. I couldn’t use my Appraisal skill on it either. The marker was blue, though.

50: Amelia

Jeez. You make it sound like you were trying to do something criminal.

But if the marker was blue, then that means it was either a player or a tamed monster.

Was there anything like a dwarf on the initial monster list? I don’t remember seeing anything like that on Amimin’s page. The closest humanoid monster is a goblin lmao

They’re not exactly *beautiful*, though. Unless that’s your kink or something I guess...?

51: Eulenspiegel

STOP PUTTING WORDS IN MY MOUTH. It WAS a dwarf! NOT a goblin!

52: Amelia

Guess it’s a mystery, then.

I looked up which monsters you could get with Advanced Tame before the game started, but I don’t recall seeing humanoid types there.

53: Eulenspiegel

It could just be a rare Zone Two monster? That no one discovered it during the beta phase.

54: KingOysterMushroom

I doubt it. There was a globally viewable map during the

beta test, that let players see how much of the area had already been explored, and I’m pretty sure the area map, items, and monster data for Zone Two were all fully unlocked.

55: Ursula

Who knows, it might not be a tamed monster though. IIRC, Summoners have the ability to set a summoned monster on their home screen.

56: Ivan

That’s plausible. Apparently, there’s only a fifty percent overlap between the types of monsters Summoners and Tamers can handle. If it’s not something we’re familiar with, then there’s a good chance it belongs to a Summoner.

57: Eulenspiegel

That *could* be the case.

58: Amelia

Or, it could be a new monster that was released with the official launch.

59: KingOysterMushroom

Obviously, we can’t discount the possibility. It’s also plausible that it’s an Elementalist’s spirit.

60: Eulenspiegel

That’s a whole lotta possibilities. I think I’ll look into it.

61: Amelia

Good luck!

62: Ivan

>60

Looking forward to your report. Not that I intend on helping though haha.

63: Ursula

>60

Do give us an update. And I won’t be helping either XD

64: KingOysterMushroom

Let us know when you find out what that creature is. You’re on your own, by the way lmao

---

65: Eulenspiegel

Y’all could at least give me a hand!

[Farming Rocks!] A Farming Thread for Farmers by Farmers

This is a thread where people who own farms in LJO can exchange information.

From topics concerning large-scale farms to small home gardens, all questions are welcome here.

Please make it clear if your post contains unverified information.

While we're grateful for actual farming tips, we're not sure how practical they'll be in the game.

20: Tagosack

>17

It'll probably be a while before we can recreate mana apples in the official version of the game. Even during the beta test, they were only cultivated by chance by a player who had Selective Breeding EX.

They also mentioned that this special version of Selective Breeding was a skill they had just happened to obtain through one of those random skill boxes, the ones they grant top-ranking players in events.

21: Charm

Selective Breeding "EX?" So they can't be cultivated with

regular Selective Breeding?

22: Tsugarun

EX skills are in a totally different league from normal skills. A lot of players tried to replicate the process, but regular Selective Breeding didn’t produce any results. You most likely need the EX version to create mana apples.

23: Terrill

Are EX skills not obtainable through regular means then?

24: Charm

I was wondering about that myself. I’d love to get my hands on them, too! I wonder if there’s a Farming EX or Propagation EX skill?

25: Thomas

It’s not *impossible*, but it’s extremely difficult.

You can’t learn EX skills simply by spending bonus points. They only appear on the list of obtainable skills if you pull some sort of trigger via an event or the right skill combination, and even then, they cost an insane amount of points.

26: Terrill

How much? Regular skills cost about four to ten points, right?

27: Tsugarun

So, I actually did have an EX skill pop up on my list during the beta test. I never found out what triggered it, though.

The skill was Arboriculture EX, which cost sixty bonus points to learn. Obviously, I couldn’t afford it.

28: Terrill

Huh? *60??* What kinda bullshit is that?

29: Charm

You get two bonus points each time you level up, so...I guess the earliest you can learn an EX skill is at level 31?

30: Tagosack

Theoretically, yes, but it’ll take you longer than that in practice.

It’s not like you can just forget all your other skills, plus you need bonus points for stat allocation.

Also, the main way crafter-type players gain XP is by crafting stuff and fulfilling quests, so naturally they take longer to level up compared to players who are geared towards combat.

31: Charm

I guess EX skills are out of my reach...

32: Thomas

It’s a shame since they’re highly potent.

Selective Breeding: Allows players to create new crop varieties by combining crops with other materials.

Selective Breeding EX: Allows players to create new crop varieties by combining several kinds of materials and items with crops. Significantly increases the chances of success and the probability of mutation.

Just look at the difference.

33: Terrill

They feel like completely different skills at that point.

34: Tsugarun

That’s why acquiring EX skills is practically impossible, at least at the beginning anyway. It might be possible to learn one randomly when you build your character, though.

35: Tagosack

Even that is probably a one-in-a-million chance.

36: Tsugarun

But it’s not *totally* impossible, right?

37: Tagosack

Farming-related skills aren’t the only skills out there. Even if you did obtain an EX skill by some miracle through your initial bonus, chances that it’ll be related to farming are pretty low. If there really was such a lucky bastard out there, though, I’d love to be their friend.

Chapter Two: Starting Over as a Late Bloomer

I arrived at the Eastern Plains, in search of some herbs to plant on our farm. The monsters in this area were fairly weak, which made it a suitable foraging ground for beginners. Upon setting foot in the plains, I immediately noticed a green marker—hidden amongst the bushes was a poisonous-looking purple plant.

“Looks like poison hemlock.”

Can I touch this? It doesn’t look very safe, I wondered as I cautiously assessed the plant. As it turned out, though, there was no cause for worry.

```
Name: Poison Hemlock
Rarity: 1 / Quality: 1★
Effect: Has a mild poisoning effect when ingested.
```

This plant wasn’t very effective on its own, but it apparently had a variety of applications if converted into poison. It also seemed like a useful plant to cultivate, I noted, treading carefully so as not to encounter any monsters.

“Hey! I found a paralyzing plant!”

Several minutes later, I came across a plant with yellow leaves that looked a bit like a dandelion. These were useful for things like potions and ointments as well.

```
Name: Paralyzing Plant
Rarity: 1 / Quality: 1★
Effect: Has a slight paralyzing effect when ingested.
```

My Concocting and Cooking skills granted me eight recipes from the start. The

initial items I could make were: potions, ointments, food rations, hunter potions, poison, paralyzing potions, honey dumplings, and salads. You could also combine random ingredients on your own and create potions and medicines without a recipe, but this method came with the risk of failure. Letting the recipe take care of the task automatically guaranteed a one hundred percent chance of success every time, albeit with lower quality results. Both methods had their advantages and disadvantages. Personally, I was keen on testing things out on my own and churning out as many new recipes as I could. That would spice things up a bit.

The next item I found was a wooden stick, which had no marker at all. While you could add just about anything in this game to your arsenal, items that didn't have any special effects were left unmarked. I was drawn to the stick, however, because of its shape, which reminded me of a staff. After all, I was defenseless at the moment. Even a makeshift weapon would be worth getting my hands on.

"Wonder if I can use this as a staff?"

Name: Wooden Stick

Rarity: 1 *Quality: 1*★ Durability: 30

Effect: Attack +1. Unable to be repaired.

Weight: 1

Much to my surprise, the stick was equippable. It was a poor replacement for my previous gear, but it was better than nothing.

Thirty minutes later, as I raced through the plains, I paused to bend down and swipe at the grass below my feet. I had now picked my sixth item.

"Not another medicinal herb!"

As I stopped to catch my breath, a giant rodent appeared, hissing, and hurled itself at me.

"Yikes! That was close!"

This was no cute mascot-type rodent, like a guinea pig or hamster, but a creepy, highly realistic rat, the type you'd expect to see in sewers—not to mention it was as big as a pit bull.

"Shoo! Get away from me!"

"*Squeak squeak.*"

"Did you just *laugh* at me, sewer trash?!"

I tried my best to fend off the creature with my wooden stick, but I was unable to deal any damage. What, you think I should've used my staff to wield some magic? If only!

I tried using one of my staff commands, Swing, but it seemed like it could only be activated when using an actual staff. That said, I doubt it would have been useful against a creature as agile as a rat anyway.

"You're just grinding fodder, get outta here!"

"Hisss!"

"Guh!"

The bastard charged headfirst into my stomach; I could feel the sensation of its fur brushing against me. Although I scarcely felt the blow itself, that strike alone cost me ten percent of my health.

The rat that was currently harassing me was known as a Fanged Rat. It was infamous as being the weakest monster in LJO, existing primarily for players just starting out to gain XP. In short, it was nothing but a trash-tier mob, so the fact that I was getting my ass whooped by said mob was saying quite a lot. Of course, I was playing the weakest of all classes, one that wasn't made for frontline fighting, and I'd already sold my protective gear. On top of this, I was still only Level 1. To describe my current state as "tissue paper" would probably be generous.

"Take that!"

"Squeak!"

"Gotcha!"

I managed to strike it, though its health meter only dropped by about ten percent.

“Yep... Time to run!”

Trying to tame it would be useless, so I took off running again. The Fanged Rat was still hot on my tail, but I ran in a zigzag to throw it off my scent, keeping my eyes on the ground all the while so as not to miss any plants. Seriously, I definitely deserved some brownie points for not giving up on what was clearly a lost cause. Of course, I was up against a nimble rat. If I was unable to shake it and kept taking hits, eventually I would run out of health points.

“Shit!”

“Squeak squeak!”

I was now down to just 3 HP; any more damage and I would be looking at a respawn.

“At least let me get one more...! D’aaaah!”

As I fell to the ground, I managed to stretch my hand out towards a green marker and pluck a mysterious plant, right before the Fanged Rat zapped my last ounce of health.

Once again, I found myself in the square where I had first appeared in the game, accompanied by the same floating sensation that I felt upon logging in.

“...Another death-warp complete.”

Was I sad? O-Of course not! After all, this was all part of my plan!

“Damn it,” I muttered, but I put aside my frustration, and assessed the last plant I had grabbed.

Name: Life Sunflower

Rarity: 1 / Quality: 1★

Effect: Potion ingredient. Recovers hunger status by one percent.

So it was a potion component. I'd lucked out here. I already knew that I could grow medicinal herbs; if I could cultivate this plant as well, I'd be one step closer to being able to mass-produce potions.

The murmur of the crowd was starting to get louder, and I could feel their eyes boring into me. Seeing someone respawn must have been a rare sight for them. I couldn't blame them, though—I would stare too if I saw someone respawning on their first day of the game.

Whatever, I'm handling things my way, I told myself as I swiftly left the square.

Within five minutes, I had arrived back at my garden. It sure was useful to have secured such an accessible plot.

"I'm back, Olto. Got some stuff for you."

"Mm-mm!"

"Well? Think we can grow them?" I asked Olto as I handed him one of each type of plant I had collected.

"Mm! Mmm-mmm-mm-mmm," Olto hummed, immediately transforming the plants into seeds.

"Wow! Way to go, Olto."

"Mm-mm."

"This is really starting to look like a proper farm."

During the hour or so that I was gone, Olto had finished plowing the once-empty field, which was now filled with rows of neatly shaped mounds.

"Mm-mm."

Olto poked holes into the mounds and began sowing the seeds he had propagated. Just like before, the seeds started sprouting almost instantaneously.

Each crop grew at a different rate, but it normally took about one to four days for them to sprout, then one to ten more for them to mature. It seemed that Olto, however, was capable of making plants sprout almost immediately. It

probably wouldn't take long for them to grow either. At this rate, I might be able to harvest crops in as little as a day, which would make daily harvests a reality. I was pumped just thinking about the possibilities.

"I'll leave you in charge of our patch, Olto!"

"Mm!"

Time to collect more plants. Hopefully I could get my hands on slightly rarer specimens this time.

"I should prepare some recovery items before I go, though."

Having some means of recovery would mean being able to explore for a bit longer. Seeing as I was completely broke, however, I had to make those items myself, so I decided to concoct some medicine using the salve-making plants I had picked.

I watched Olto work out of the corner of my eye as I fetched some water from the well. Although the well water was meant for farming, it could apparently be used for crafting items also.

"I'll use Auto Mode to make the meds."

I followed the instructions and transferred the salve-making plants and some water to the mortar that was included in my basic concoction kit, then began grinding them together with a pestle—a simple enough job. After a while, the plants turned into a paste. Finally, I infused the mixture with magic, and the mortar glowed faintly. There was a cute little *Poof!* and the medicine was ready. The pills were even packaged neatly in individual wax paper packets...though I had no idea where the paper came from.

Whatever! Now I had some medicine.

```
Name: Medicine
Rarity: 1 / Quality: 1★
Effect: Recovers 10 HP. (10-minute cooldown)
```

Not only was this recovery item less effective than low-grade potions, it also

had the lowest quality rating, but it was more than enough for me. At this level, one of these was almost enough to fully restore my HP!

“All right, that’s recovery taken care of. Let’s get going.”

The next place I was headed to was the Western Forest. Like the Eastern Plains, it was a beginner-friendly site. Before that, however, I had to do some research. I’d gotten myself into a sorry state on the last venture because I’d neglected to adequately prepare. I forget who it was that said, *Knowledge is power*, but I’d definitely heard those words before. For the umpteenth time today, I returned to my trusty source of information, the Farming Guild.

It was currently after 5 p.m. in-game time. If I didn’t hurry, it would soon be nighttime. Not only were there more monsters at night, they supposedly also attacked you in groups. A small fry like me would be dead in an instant. Besides, it was harder to find plants in the dark, so there really was no benefit to staying out late.

“Better get it all done before sundown.”

The old man at the Farming Guild told me there was a river deep inside the Western Forest, where you could apparently find all sorts of interesting items.

“Like water pumice, for example.”

According to Gramps, water pumice was a practical item that helped purify water. There was supposedly a mining area as well, but since I didn’t have any of the appropriate equipment, I decided to skip it for the time being.

“Better set the medicine to quick access.”

I created a shortcut for the three pills I had just made. Shortcuts allowed me to access my items from my inventory directly by thinking of the associated keyword that I’d set. While this lessened the item’s effect, it was a useful function to have during battle.

“Keyword, keyword... I’ll just go with ‘Cure.’”

With that, I entered into the Western Forest, armed and ready for the task.

My plan was simple—run as fast as I could and flee from my enemies. I was here to gather items; fighting was out of the question. First stop: the river at the

end of the forest.

“Let’s go, shall we?”

“Cure!”

Twenty minutes later and I’d already used up one of my three precious pills. I wasn’t expecting it to suddenly appear in my mouth, though, and almost spat it out. The taste was nothing to write home about; the thought of having to swallow two more of these churned my stomach, but I had more pressing matters to deal with right now.

“Squeak!”

I was currently being chased by an adorable little squirrel. Enter mob number two, the Gray Squirrel. It was just as weak as a Fanged Rat, but it was still a formidable opponent for someone like me. Not only was it small, it was also nimble, and I doubted I could get in a clean hit.

I had no choice but to run. I ran as fast as my legs could carry me, not looking back, my gathering quest abandoned altogether. Thanks to the cooldown, it would be some minutes before I could take any more medicine, but the squirrel continued to attack relentlessly as I ran, racking up the damage points.

After over five minutes of running, I was utterly spent, my breath coming in short gasps. Thankfully, the Gray Squirrel that had been chasing me was nowhere to be seen. It appeared that I had managed to rid myself of it.

“Oof, if this wasn’t a game, I’d definitely be puking right now!” I wheezed.

As luck would have it, my haphazard running had gained me quite a bit of progress. The map indicated that I was already about halfway through the forest.

“Let’s head to the river, then.”

I gingerly made my way through the forest and presently found myself at what I assumed to be the river, though it was more of a stream really.

The medicine’s ten-minute cooldown had expired now, so I decided to take one pill to recover my health.

“Gosh, these taste bad. I wonder if I can drink the water here?”

I needed something to get rid of the taste fast, so I scooped up some water in my hands and assessed it. Like the well water, it was of the lowest quality, but it appeared to be suitable for both drinking and crafting.

“Well, that’s a relief.”

To be able to rid myself of that aftertaste before I resumed my search was a blessing. Being able to taste things properly in the game was actually a pretty annoying feature. Now that my palate had been cleansed, though, I decided to walk along the stream and see what I could find. However, after a few steps, I immediately regretted my decision.

“The footing sucks,” I grumbled.

Even the river bank had been made to look and feel hyperrealistic. Thankfully, though, I managed to find a green marker alongside the river bank.

“This stone?”

I observed the marked item. While it seemed like an ordinary rock at first glance, upon assessment I found out that it was, in fact, a water pumice.

```
Name: Water Pumice
Rarity: 2 / Quality: 1★
Effect: Can be added to water to aid in purification.
```

That was a pretty vague description. I supposed that meant I could use it to create purified water, which was presumably a notch above regular water, although I’d have to test that theory to confirm it. I was sure it would come in handy when concocting items, though.

“All right, anything else here? Some new plants, maybe...? Oh hey, another green marker!” I exclaimed, spotting a marker between the river bank and the forest. When I approached the spot, however, I found nothing but dirt. Although there were some clumps of grass dotting the patch, they were nothing but ordinary weeds.

“So, what is it then?”

Is the grass some kind of item? I wondered as I assessed the ground.

Name: Mulch

Rarity: 1 / Quality: 1★

Effect: Add to soil to increase cultivation efficiency. Effect lasts for five days. Can be used in conjunction with other fertilizers.

Aha! So the *dirt* was an item! A perfect item for my newly acquired farm, at that. It was a shame that the mulch was a single-use item, though I supposed the fact that the effect lasted for five days made up for it. Talk about striking gold.

“Now if I could just find some rare plants.”

So far, I had only managed to collect a few medicinal herbs.

“This sure is taking a while.”

The sky was getting darker, which meant it was almost nightfall. I had to hurry. Just then, I heard a rustling in the bushes, and a Fanged Rat leapt into my path.

“Of course. I knew things were going a little *too* smoothly.”

In a bewildering showing of aggression, the creature lunged at me the moment it saw me. There was a cool flash of pale green light, and my health meter immediately plummeted to the red zone. I had apparently sustained a critical hit.

“Guh! C-Cure!” I gasped. “Damn it!”

If you think I’m about to be defeated here, you’re dead wrong! I silently spat. I had to go deeper into the forest. *That’s right, keep running until you get your hands on something*, I urged myself.

Again I ran until exhaustion set in, at which point it appeared that I had

shaken off the Fanged Rat, which was no longer in sight.

“That was close...”

I had managed to survive, but I no longer had any means of recovery. If I were to encounter a monster now, I would most certainly die. *Please, no more monsters*, I begged, but sadly my prayers went unanswered. Just then, three more Fanged Rats appeared before me.

“Squeak squeak!” the creatures hissed, before attacking me all at once.

“Oh I am *not* dying here!”

With that, I was back on the run.

I dashed like mad through the forest, the rats attacking me ruthlessly all the while. Now and then I felt something strike my back, but I knew it was game over for me if I stumbled, so I continued to run with surprising persistence, keeping low to the ground.

“Squeak squeak!”

“Squeak!”

Those bastards! They’re just coming after me because I’m an easy target! Damn it! Still, I refused to die just yet. All right, rats, time to show you what I’ve got!

During the pursuit, I thought I caught sight of several green markers, but I ignored them all. Right now, I had to focus my full attention on escaping from these rats! My panic rose as my health dropped, but I refused to give up. Unfortunately, the rats showed no signs of giving up either. I was done for.

“Gotta at least make it to that tree!” I shouted. Atop a steep slope overlooking the river, there stood a lone tree, which looked vastly different from the others.

“*Aaaargh*!”

I raced up the slope, using every last bit of strength that I had. By the time I reached the tree, I was out of breath. Even though you didn’t feel pain in this game, you were still able to feel shortness of breath. My lungs were aching.

“...Is that a peach tree?” I wheezed.

My Appraisal skill informed me that it was indeed a green peach tree, which bore a single fruit on one of its low branches. Guided by the green marker, I stretched my hand towards the peach and plucked it off.

Name: Green Peach

Rarity: 2 / Quality: 1★

Effect: Replenishes hunger level by ten percent.

Aside from the color, it indeed resembled a peach. A sweet fragrance drifted from it.

“Heck yes...!”

“Your Gathering skill has increased to level 2.”

Not only had I snagged a rare item, but a level-up, too! Could this be my lucky day? I stored the fruit away in my inventory with haste.

“Looks like the coast is clea— Guh!”

“Squeak squeak!”

A Fanged Rat had snuck up behind me while I was distracted; I hadn’t heard its footsteps over the sound of the babbling water. The rat hurled itself at my back repeatedly, and after a split-second sensation of being suspended in midair, I found my body catapulted forward—headlong over the edge of the cliff.

“Y-You’ve gotta be kidding! Eep!”

Naturally, I was scared out of my wits. I was basically bungee jumping without a cord, after all. The wind roared in my ears, and before I could even register the feeling of the wind against my cheeks, I approached the surface of the water.

“Aaaah!” A scream escaped my throat. This was as terrifying as my death at the hands of the Wild Dogs.

I plunged at least ten meters, and several seconds later, I crashed into the water. Although I felt no pain, the shock was immense. Once again, my body felt as if it were floating, and I was transported back to the same old public square.

“There goes another one.”

I was starting to grow accustomed to this. I turned my back on the other players and began heading home, ignoring their blatant stares.

“Olto, I’m home,” I announced.

“Mm-mm!” Olto greeted me.

My cute little buddy toddled over to me, all smiles. He then began tugging earnestly at my legs.

“Mm-mm, mm-mm.”

He appeared to be pointing in the direction of our field.

“What is it?”

“Mm-mm.”

I followed his indication to discover some fairly large young sprouts, far bigger than the shoots I recalled, already growing leaves. I was stunned. We had only sowed those seeds a few hours ago!

“They’ve grown this much *already*?!”

“Mm.”

“Wow. You’re amazing, Olto.”

“Mm-mm-mmm!”

The praise seemed to please him. I patted him on the head as I handed him one of the trophies from my previous hunt.

“Here, I got you something.”

“Mm!”

The first item I gave him was the mulch, which he took from my hands enthusiastically, jumping up and down. He immediately started sprinkling it on

the dirt.

“Also, can you do anything with this?” I asked, showing him the green peach I’d plucked. I was hoping we’d be able to grow it on our farm using his Arboriculture skill. If he couldn’t, then I’d just sell it somewhere or eat it myself.

“Mm? Mmm. Mm-mm.”

The fruit glowed as Olto hummed, the way he had when activating his Propagation skill before. Within a second, the peach had transformed into a tiny sapling.

It appeared that his Propagation skill turned plants into seeds and trees into saplings. However, unlike plants, which produced two seeds, the saplings didn’t double in number. Of course, this was probably the trade-off, as you could harvest multiple items from them when they matured.

Name: Green Peach Sapling

Rarity: 2 / Quality: 1★

Effect: Grows into a Green Peach tree. Beginners are unable to nurture this sapling.

Hmm. My guess was right; it *was* a difficult tree to grow. I was glad that Olto possessed the Arboriculture skill.

“Your Command ability has increased to level 2.”

Awesome! Another level-up. Making your monsters work seemed to be the key to more skill experience.

“I guess that’s it for today, though.”

I had already respawned three times; any more than that would incur a death penalty. Besides that, it was nighttime now. Not only were there more monsters about, but it was more difficult to collect items in the dark.

“Guess I could just log out for now. I still have a while before the time limit, though...”

In order to protect players' health, there was a limit to how many hours you could dive into LJO at a time. Of course, this was a rule that applied to all full dive VR games.

There had been a variety of tragic accidents when full dive VR gaming consoles first went on the market. In regular junkie mode, you could eat while gaming and fall asleep if you felt sleepy, but with full dive VR games, where your consciousness itself entered a virtual reality while your body was half asleep, it was difficult to sense changes to your actual physical body. Some players lost track of time and gamed for over one hundred hours straight without eating or drinking, which led to them collapsing upon logging out, and getting whisked away by an ambulance. In more extreme cases, there were some hardcore players who completely emptied their bowels and hooked themselves up to an IV drip before they logged in and started playing. The worst case reported was a player who died of heart failure after staying logged in to a VR game for a full week.

As a result, VR games nowadays had various regulations to prevent such accidents from occurring. Regular enforced logouts were one of those measures. If you failed to log out after a certain amount of time, the game would apparently eject you by force.

That being said, I still had a few hours or so left. I was mentally exhausted, however, and very much needed a break.

"Wait a minute."

Was that a wise idea? I had already gotten off to a slow start. Wasn't it better to look for something I could do to try and maximize my experience points? I decided to check out the notice board at the Adventurers' Guild. If there were any quests that I could fulfill, then great; if not, then that was that.

I managed to find a super-easy quest: washing dishes at an inn. The reward was pitiful—one medicinal herb—but I was grateful for having something safe and easy to do. It was like working a part-time job.

One hour after accepting the quest, I was done and on my way back to report to the guild.

"I'm pooped..."

Though I had elected to accept the quest myself, I honestly hadn't been expecting to wash dishes inside of a game. Oh well, at least I had made the innkeeper happy.

"Thanks, dear! I'm so glad you came! No one else would take the job," said the woman.

"Don't mention it."

Although she was just a non-player character, it was still nice to hear a thank-you from a real-looking person.

The Adventurers' Guild was open even at night, and the receptionists were different from the ones I had seen in the afternoon. The attention to detail in this game was really something. Completing my quest only took a second; I simply had to browse the notice board from my status window and press a couple of buttons. Once that was taken care of, I decided to look for another quest, and found one similar to the dishwashing quest—helping an item shop organize its storeroom. The reward was incredibly cheap—a mere 50 G—but that was about the only type of quest I could do. The task was simple; all I had to do was follow the old man's instructions and move some boxes and carts around.

"Ho ho ho. I appreciate your help, boy. You're the first person to accept this quest."

With good reason. Why would anybody waste two hours of their precious time for a measly 50 G? You could make far more than that by collecting items in the fields and killing a few monsters. Good luck getting anyone to accept this type of quest at this stage of the game.

"Look at the time..." I muttered. "Time to log out."

Now, I was thoroughly drained, and could definitely use that break. It was better to rest and resume playing at dawn. Olto would be able to take care of our patch in the meanwhile.

"That reminds me, better try out the water pumice before I go."

Using the money I'd earned, I bought a wooden cask, and filled it with water from the well before adding the pumice to it. There was no immediate change,

though. I probably had to leave it for a while.

“See you tomorrow, buddy,” I said to Olto, bidding him farewell.

“Mm-mm.”

The following day, at 6 a.m. on January 2nd, in-game time, I logged back in to LJO.

First things first—to the farm! I raced down the path that led from the square to our humble patch, excited to see what I might find.

“Morning, Olto!” I greeted.

“Mm-mm,” he replied.

“Whoa! This is amazing!” I gasped, stunned by the sight before me.

Our farming plot, which had been completely barren at the start of yesterday, was now lush with greenery.

“Let’s see, we’ve got medicinal herbs, poison hemlock, paralyzing plants, life sunflowers, edible grass, and salve-making plants...and they’re all higher quality now, too!”

Those plants definitely had a one-star rating when I gave them to Olto yesterday; now, they had all risen to three stars.

“Mind if I harvest these?”

If this were real life, I would assume I was supposed to pull them out by the roots or something, but who knew what the rules were in-game. I hadn’t stopped to consider the mechanics of this during my whirlwind grass-picking tour, but now I wondered—would the method of harvesting affect the quality of the crops?

“Mm.”

As if to answer my unspoken question, Olto grabbed one of the plants near him with his hand, yanked it out of the ground, and handed it to me. *Oh.* I guess I could just rip it out like any old weed. I followed suit and picked some poison hemlock. This specimen was bigger than the one-star variety, and darker in color, which gave the impression that it was even more poisonous.

The morning's harvest totaled two medicinal herbs, two poison hemlock, two paralyzing plants, two life sunflowers, five salve-making plants, and five clumps of edible grass.

"This is incredible! Great job, Olto!"

"Mm-mm!" Olto crowed as I patted him on the head. He didn't seem to mind that I was tousling his hair as aggressively as I might when praising my parents' dog. The online forums said it was essential to communicate with your monsters; this obviously applied to humanoid types as well.

"Let's see, what else...? How's the water?"

"Mm."

Olto tottered towards me with a wooden cask in hand. The way he carried the cask like an enthusiastic small child was rather endearing, though it also made me nervous. I worried he was going to trip.

"Mm!" he said, presenting the cask.

"Thanks."

"Mm-mm."

"I see. So the water pumice breaks after one use."

The water pumice that I'd added to the cask the day before had split into two, rendering it unusable. Regardless, the cask now had a green marker clearly visible above it.

"Still looks like regular water to me."

I tried storing the water, cask and all, in my inventory. The cask stayed where it was, but I now had ten additional items named Purified Water among my possessions. Using the water pumice had turned out to be a success.

```
Name: Purified Water
Rarity: 2 / Quality: 1★
Effect: Item.
```

“Well, that should be everything I need to make potions.”

As a bonus, the items I had were of better quality than what you could typically obtain at this stage. From what I’d heard, other people appeared to be making potions by simply collecting one-star wild medicinal herbs and life sunflowers and mixing them with ordinary well water, which put me at an advantage.

“Let’s get cracking.”

I followed the Auto Mode crafting instructions and ground some three-star medicinal herbs and life sunflowers into a paste, then added the purified water and mixed everything together. The steps were essentially the same as making medicine, only with different ingredients. Once again, the mortar emitted a faint glow, and my potion was ready.

“All right!”

```
Name: Low-Grade Potion
Rarity: 1 / Quality: 3★
Effect: Recovers 30 HP. (5-minute cooldown)
```

Three stars, baby! Those high-quality ingredients really made a difference. I had no idea where the bottle it was in came from, though.

This potion would recover ten more health points than the one that had come with my starter kit, and was bound to come in handy during the early stages of the game—though, currently either one would more than suffice to bring me back to full health. Honestly, it was probably even wasteful of me to use these higher-quality potions on myself. Better to sell them for cash to buy the things that I actually needed.

“*Your Concoct skill has increased to level 2.*”

Excellent. My skills were leveling up nicely too. I decided to check my other recipes to see what else I could make.

“Let’s see, I already made medicine yesterday. All that’s left to try is food

rations.”

Like medicine, food rations could be made with just grass and water, with one clump of edible grass yielding five rations. A single ration bar recovered twenty percent of your hunger status, which meant I only had to make them once a day for a full day’s supply of food. Considering their taste, I would have liked to avoid them altogether if I could, but I couldn’t very well starve myself. I decided to make ten of them, as well as two pills of medicine for emergency purposes. The only problem was that both of these items required well water. I doubted that even increasing the quality of the food rations would improve their taste, and it seemed like a waste to use purified water to make medicine. After all, even the lowest grade was more than potent enough for my purposes.

In order to make poison and paralyzing potions, I needed three poison hemlock and three paralyzing plants each, which was unfortunately more than what I currently had. I also lacked the ingredients for Hunter Potions, which required poison hemlock, paralyzing plants, and a type of mushroom called a red panther cap. Honey dumplings weren’t an option either since I didn’t have honey, and I wasn’t sure where I could obtain it, but I hoped I could at least find some red panther caps.

“I still need a lot more ingredients.”

Being able to craft items didn’t mean much on its own, though; my stats wouldn’t increase unless my base level did as well. While crafting activities did grant players some experience, the amount was negligible. If possible, I needed to gain experience points through other means.

“Hmm. I guess doing some basic quests would be the fastest path to XP. Maybe it’s time to go wash some more dishes?”

Completing quests gained you not only rewards, but also experience points. Washing dishes barely gave me any points, though, so I wasn’t keen on repeating the effort. If I could find a quest that didn’t require any washing up and rewarded me with new kinds of seeds, though, that would be awesome. I made a mental note to visit the guild to check out the available quests later.

“Before that, I gotta sow more seeds.”

With all of my crops harvested, it was time to start the next batch.

“I know I just picked this, but could you propagate it for me?”

“Mm!”

I handed Olto the medicinal herb that I’d just harvested. I knew that the quality of plants deteriorated once they had been propagated, but what would happen if I propagated a three-star item? What if it only went down one rank and transformed into two-star seeds? The one-star seeds I sowed yesterday had turned into three-star crops, which meant that the quality of crops must increase by two stars with each growing.

If my calculations were correct, that would mean that if I continued to harvest and propagate plants every day, I would be able to create a ten-star medicinal herb in eight days. At least, that was what I hoped...

“Mm-mm.”

“Bingo! For real?!”

Lo and behold, the seeds that Olto produced had a two-star rating. Clearly, I had cracked the code.

I handed Olto one more medicinal herb, two poison hemlock, two paralyzing plants, one life sunflower, three salve-making plants, and one clump of edible grass to propagate, then sowed their seeds. I was looking forward to tomorrow’s harvest. Forget crafting or concocting, the first order of business would be to create as high-quality ingredients as possible.

“All right, now to go look for some quests.”

Now that I no longer had anything to harvest or craft, I needed something to kill the time while I waited for Olto to finish up his work. I headed straight to the Adventurers’ Guild and checked out the notice board, where I managed to find the perfect quest.

“Weeding, eh?”

The quest was only worth 50 G—one of the lowest-tier rewards—but it seemed like it would take the least amount of time to complete out of all the combat-free quests. I followed the route marked on the map to the farm in the South District that had sent out the request.

“Anybody home?” I called out upon arrival.

“Why, hello there,” an old man replied. “Are you the young fella who’s come to help me out?”

“That’s right.”

“You’re the first otherworldly traveler to accept this quest. I can’t tell you how much I appreciate it,” he thanked me.

Following the old man’s instructions, I then proceeded to remove five rows worth of weeds. This was way more tiring than doing the dishes. Who the hell picks *weeds* in a game, anyway? Still, it felt nice to be thanked by the old man, and weeding was probably a skill that would come in handy on my own farm. The quest only took about an hour to complete, which wasn’t bad at all, at least by my standards. After that, I did a variety of other quests, such as delivering letters and helping an old lady who had injured her leg to do her shopping, which gained me more experience. It didn’t seem like I would level up anytime soon, but like they say, slow and steady wins the race.

It was pretty cool to see the smiles on everyone’s faces as well, and all of the quest givers were excited to tell me I was the first person to accept their quest. Unlike certain manga protagonists, I wasn’t about to insist that NPCs had souls or deserved to be treated like human beings or anything like that, but their advanced artificial intelligence and realistic way of talking made it hard not to feel a sense of kinship towards them.

“Phew, I’m really racking ’em up here. Hm? Hang on...” As I completed my final request and headed back to the Adventurers’ Guild, something suddenly occurred to me. “Crap! I haven’t completed that herb quest yet!”

I had totally forgotten about the gathering quest I had accepted on my first day. Thanks to all my other errands though, I now had more than enough herbs for it.

“Might as well get it done now.”

Ding dong.

“Huh?”

“*This is a public announcement.*”

Just then, I heard a voice over the PA system, a server-wide announcement apparently.

“*Today marks one day since the official launch of LJO. Thank you for logging in, everyone.*”

I glanced up at the clock to see that it was currently noon, in-game time. Of course. Exactly twenty-four hours had now passed in the game since it launched yesterday at noon.

“*We will be giving out special rewards to our most active players so far.*”

“Huh.”

I didn’t remember getting any notification like that. Probably some kind of secret achievement. I was sure that was none of my business, though. I had failed to get a head start, I hadn’t won a single battle, and I had barely completed any quests... Man, that was depressing.

“...Might as well check out the announcement, though,” I sighed.

I was currently in one of the public squares in the South District. Everyone around me had paused, staring intently at their status windows, probably perusing the same information. Unlike me, however, the other players seemed to have hope in their eyes.

“*First, the player who has traveled the greatest distance will be awarded the title of ‘Adventurer,’*” the voice announced, and the crowd let out a collective sigh.

Titles were awarded by completing specific actions or quests, and were extremely hard to obtain. Most titles came with perks like raising your skills or stats, so you could consider yourself pretty lucky if you got one this early on in the game. The fact that these titles were being given out at a surprise event also meant that they were going to be ultra-rare and probably a one-time-only award. Predictably, everyone was awaiting the names of the winners with bated breath.

“*The total distance traveled was 50.6 kilometers. In accordance with this*

player's appearance, they will be awarded the title of 'Purple-Haired Adventurer.'"

I couldn't tell whether 50 kilometers was a lot, but according to what I could glean from the conversations around me, this player most definitely possessed horse-riding skills. That made sense.

"*Next, the player who has collected the most items will be awarded the title of 'Explorer.'"*

Neither title had anything to do with me. If only I hadn't messed up my character build, I might have been able to feel a smidgen of excitement... No, forget it. There was no use crying over spilled milk. I had already decided that I would do things my own way, remember?

"*The total number of items gathered was 191. In accordance with this player's appearance, they will be awarded the title of 'Ruby Red Explorer.'"*

Was that another reference to their hair color? If they were already this active, they were bound to become famous, so I guessed I would find out eventually.

"*Finally, the player who has died the most deaths will be awarded the title of 'Pioneer.'"*

What? *Deaths*? Did they mean the number of respawns?

"*The total number of deaths is three. In accordance with this player's appearance, they will be awarded the title of 'Silver-Haired Pioneer.'"*

Ding dong.

Silver-Haired...Pioneer...?

"*You have obtained the title 'Silver-Haired Pioneer,'"* my status screen announced.

Yep, it turned out that ignominious honor was mine, folks. I mean, I did have silver hair, but like, seriously? Couldn't they have at least announced it with a fanfare of trumpets or something? That pretty much just sounded like the doorbell ringing.

As I was trying to process what had happened, I became aware of the other

players whispering around me.

"*Three* deaths on the first day? You've got to be kidding me."

"Who the hell does that? Don't tell me it's you."

"Hell no. My hair is white, not silver!"

"Ha ha ha, that's so lame."

Up until now, the players had been oohing and aahing at each announcement, but they were now openly ridiculing my dishonorable mention. I was a laughingstock.

I probably shouldn't let on that that unlucky bastard is me, I thought to myself.

Unfortunately, there were dozens of sets of eyes already pointed my way, which I could not pretend was simply my imagination.

"Hey, didn't that guy respawn yesterday?"

"He has silver hair."

"Then that means..."

Shit! If I didn't get out of here immediately, everyone would know that it was me! Sure, I craved as much attention as the next guy, and I'd even fantasized about becoming famous at one point... But not like this! This was absolutely not the kind of fame that I was after.

"Anyway, let's get to the guild."

I lowered my eyes furtively and hurried out of the square. Thankfully, no one seemed to be following me. On the way to the guildhall, I decided to take my mind off of things by checking out my newly acquired title. A new section named "Titles" had been added to my status menu, which contained the following information:

Title: Silver-Haired Pioneer

Effect: You have gained 4,000 G and two bonus points, as well as the skill Flee.

Well, how about that. Money, bonus points, and even a new skill. Although I wasn't proud of this achievement, I had definitely scored with these rewards. Now to see what my new skill was capable of.

Flee: Shortens your enemy's range of pursuit when fleeing and makes it easier to escape.

That basically meant that my enemies would give up on pursuing me more easily. That was a relief; it was just the kind of skill I needed—and one which I would definitely be putting to good use.

"Time to actually fulfill this quest now..."

After fleeing the square, I made my way to the Adventurers' Guild, as I had been intending to. Upon arrival, I selected the items that I needed to deliver from my status window and pressed "Done."

"*You have successfully completed this quest. You will now receive your reward*."

Five medicinal herbs disappeared from my inventory, and in turn, my in-game currency increased by 50 G. The quest was now complete.

"*Your base level has increased to level 2. You have acquired two bonus points.*"

"*Your Job level has increased to level 2.*"

"Hey, I leveled up. That worked out nicely."

By increasing my levels I also earned additional bonus points, similar to the ones I had received during the character creation process. These could be used to learn new skills or raise my stats. Since I had acquired two more points when I received my title, I currently had a total of four available bonus points.

"All right, that should be enough."

I immediately opened my status menu and pulled up the list of obtainable skills.

“Let’s see... There it is.”

The skill that I had been hoping to learn was Farming. Even though I mainly depended on Olto to take care of our farm, I couldn’t let him do *all* the work. There were bound to be times when he would need my help. However, I didn’t want to run the risk of ruining the quality of our crops, which was why it was crucial that I learned this skill as soon as possible. With Farming in my arsenal, I could now tend to our field without worry.

“And done. Let’s keep the momentum going with some more quests.”

I scanned the bulletin board, wondering if there was anything else I was qualified for. Given that even the beginner-level quests had landed me in life-or-death situations, that wasn’t an easy feat.

“Hmm, easier said than done...”

Wait a minute. Didn’t the old man at the Farming Guild say something about quests too? If I remembered correctly, he had mentioned a quest noticeboard when I registered as a guild member.

“To the Farming Guild it is, then.”

Couldn’t forget to stop by the Magical Beasts Guild either, which was closer to my current location according to the map. I had yet to pay a visit, despite it technically being my primary guild.

“Let’s go there first.”

The Magical Beasts Guild was a ten-minute walk from the Adventurers’ Guild and was located on the border between the South and West Districts, though it was technically located in the latter. It was a massive European-style building, unlike either the Adventurers’ Guild or the Farming Guild in appearance, and rather charmless in impression. It had a brick exterior, but the walls and roof were largely covered in vines, lending it an oppressive atmosphere. If I were a movie protagonist seeking shelter at this house on a rainy day, I would definitely find a mad scientist or vampire on the other side of the front door—that was the kind of vibe it gave off.

The place was enormous; the full grounds were more than five times the size of those of the Farming Guild, and the building itself was more than twice as

big. Since the Magical Beasts Guild was in charge of Tamers and Summoners, it had a large open area where players could leave their monsters while inside. According to the online forums, this area was called a “monsterway.” The same forum speculated that the guild having such a vast parking lot might mean that we could expect to get our hands on much larger monsters in the later stages of the game. Indeed, it didn’t make much sense to leave small monsters outside when you could just bring them in with you. I wouldn’t even be surprised to see something as massive as a dragon out here one day. The possibilities seemed endless.

“And in we go.”

I mustered up my courage and opened the door to the Magical Beasts Guild, which revealed a room quite unlike what the building’s intimidating exterior would imply. A well-used wooden counter added a sense of warmth and homeliness, and the warm orange glow of ceiling lamps gently lit up the floor. A few indoor plants were strategically placed throughout the room. Even the dreary shade of the dark brown carpet managed to add to the coziness. However, that wasn’t the only thing I found impressive.

“Hi.”

“Hello, and welcome,” the receptionist greeted me.

The receptionist NPC was an adorable black-haired woman who gave off a pure and innocent air—in short, *jackpot*. What an upgrade from the Farming Guild...

The first floor of the building was spacious, and there seemed to be a second floor as well, which according to the signs housed an incubation room. Unlike the Monster Synthesis Summoners had, Tamers had a system known as Monster Breeding, which enabled you to breed monsters that were compatible with each other and make them lay eggs. This allowed the spawning of monsters with higher-than-normal stats, or brand-new specimens, which sometimes occurred when you bred monsters of high compatibility. Unlike synthesis, however, there was a factor of randomness to the results, so it was difficult to achieve your desired effect. Additionally, in order to hatch your monster’s eggs, you apparently needed to use one of the guild’s incubators, or

else set one on your home screen. If I could manage to tame another monster, there was a chance that I could hatch some eggs too.

Wait for me, incubation room! I'll be back soon!

Incidentally, the basement was designated the Synthesis room. I guessed that was where the Summoners went.

Anyway, back to business. Right now, I was supposed to be looking for the quest noticeboard.

"Excuse me. Where's the noticeboard?" I asked the receptionist.

"Right this way, sir."

The board was so tiny, I couldn't tell what it was at first. It was about one-thirtieth the size of the board at the Adventurers' Guild and looked just like a regular corkboard. I quickly scanned the list of available quests. Aside from delivery-type quests, there were also special quests that required you to tame specific monsters.

"Why are some of these red? There's some blue ones too."

Quests were usually indicated in black, but I spotted a few highlighted in different colors.

"What do the different colors mean?" I asked.

"Quests in blue indicate that you have fulfilled all of the requirements. Red stands for quests that you have partially fulfilled."

"Partially fulfilled?"

"For example, you may own the items necessary to complete the quest, but you may need to go back home and retrieve them."

"I see."

"Another example would be special quests that require you to learn specific skills. You may be able to fulfill the requirements for these by paying the necessary amount of bonus points."

Hearing that, I immediately checked the list of blue quests.

Special Quest

Requirement: Raise your Monster Taming ability to level 5.

Reward: 1,200 G

Time Limit: None

Huh? Really? I'd already raised my level using my initial bonus points before the game even started. Did that count? Not that I had any objections; that was pretty much a godsend. I promptly selected the quest.

"You have fulfilled the requirements of this quest. Would you like to mark it as complete?"

"Yes, please."

"*Your base level has increased to level 3. You have acquired two bonus points.*"

"*Your Job level has increased to level 3.*"

No way. A single quest and I had leveled up again. I guessed that one had been worth a lot of experience points. Plus, another 1,200 G—what a godsend!

L-Let's check out the others as well!

Although I was out of blue quests, there were still three marked in red.

Special Quest

Requirement: Show Barbara a level 5 monster.

Reward: 500 G

Time Limit: None

Special Quest

Requirement: Show Barbara a unique specimen.

Reward: 3,000 G

Time Limit: None

Special Quest

Requirement: Show Barbara a monster that has acquired either a rare or EX skill.

Reward: 5,000 G

Time Limit: None

There was no doubt about it: I could complete all of these quests as long as I had Olto with me. However, that left me with one question.

“Um, who’s Barbara?”

“That would be me,” she replied.

“Oh, I see. Wait, so I just need to show my monster to *you*?”

“Yes! I love monsters! Rare monsters, cute monsters, cool monsters, you name it. I want to see them all!” Barbara exclaimed dreamily with her hands clasped in front of her chest, in a way that was somehow both cute *and* sexy...though it would probably have been less cringey if we hadn’t been talking about monsters, of all things. It was as though some switch had flipped in her. “So please, I would love it if you brought me some interesting monsters to see! I’ll make sure to reward you, of course.”

So, she was basically just using the guild to fulfill her own desires? Was that even allowed? Not that I cared, though, with how big the reward was.

“Olto’s busy tending to our farm right now, so I’ll bring him here once he’s done,” I replied.

Suddenly, it dawned on me. If I had come to the Magical Beasts Guild first, I wouldn’t have had to sell all of my gear...

“Ha ha...”

“Is something wrong?” Barbara asked.

“It’s nothing...” I sighed, exasperated at my stupidity. “I should head back to

the Farming Guild...”

I felt like I might cry if I stayed there, so I headed to the Farming Guild, hoping to find some profitable quests. Sadly though, those hopes were dashed. There were no quests that I could easily fulfill there, which should have been obvious if I thought about it. Farming wasn’t my main job, and I hadn’t selected any farming-related bonuses at character creation.

Still, I managed to at least find a few quests that could be completed in the near future, mostly those which involved successfully growing several different types of plants, or harvesting and delivering crops above a certain quality. I would have to work on increasing the variety of my crops and improving their quality moving forward. In order to do that, however, it was evident that I had to gather more items...

Gathering quests were by far the most common lower-level quests, but it seemed highly inefficient to risk my life every time I so much as ventured into the forest.

“I need some type of protective gear, for starters. It doesn’t have to be as good as a silver robe, but something slightly above average would be nice.”

I was also concerned about the matter of market prices. Were similar items priced the same across the board, or did the price vary from shop to shop? This was pretty important, as it affected the selling price of my potions.

“I think there were some stalls in the square.”

There were several public squares in the Town of Beginnings, and each square was home to a number of stalls.

“The small square in the south should be the closest.”

True to my recollection, I found ten-odd NPC-run stalls when I arrived at the open space. Aside from a weapon shop and apothecary, there was a grocery store and a bait and tackle shop as well.

“Looks like the price of medicine is the same at all NPC shops,” I mumbled as I strolled through the square, my mouth full of the grilled rabbit skewers I had just purchased after succumbing to the enticing smell. “God, these are good. Can’t tell if I like the sauced or the plain salted ones better,” I smacked.

I couldn’t believe I got to eat something this good this early in the game. If NPCs could create food this tasty, what would high-quality player-made dishes taste like? I had Cooking skills myself, so if I could just get my hands on some ingredients...

As I was lost in thought, I heard somebody call out to me.

“Hey there. Got a minute, mister?”

“Me?”

“Yes, you.”

Sometimes it’s rough being a guy; it was a rather suspicious-sounding invitation, but I felt compelled to turn around. Surprisingly, I was greeted by a slender flaxen-haired beauty with cat ears. Her short hair curled at the ends, and a pair of black cat ears with white tips sprung from the top of her head. A set of inquisitive gray-blue eyes gazed back at me.



I assumed from the blue marker above her head that she was a player.

“Are you a player, miss?” I asked, confirming.

“I am,” she replied.

“Wow. I thought there were only NPC-owned shops here.”

“Well, I guess player-run shops are still pretty rare. It doesn’t cost much to buy a stall, though. Certain job classes get one for free with their initial bonuses.”

“Huh. But sure, I’ll have a look.”

Upon browsing, I realized that the prices at her store were different from other stalls. Medicine, for instance, was 100 G cheaper than at the NPC-run stores, while poison was 150 G more expensive.

“Did you set these prices yourself?”

“Ah, so you noticed,” she said. “Indeed I did. That’s the good thing about having your own shop.”

“Why are your poisons more expensive?”

“Oh, that’s because I made them myself. They’re slightly more effective than regular ones.”

That certainly seemed to be the case, considering their three-star rating.

“Of course, whether these shops are better or not really depends. There are plenty of nasty players who’ll try to rip you off.”

Judging from everything so far, I felt like I could trust this player. At the very least, there didn’t seem to be a considerable difference in price between her shop and NPC stalls.

“Do you sell any protective gear?”

“Sorry, no stock at the moment. I mainly specialize in tools. If you’re looking for armor, I recommend checking out Lewin’s Arms and Armor Shop in the Western Town Square.”

Now that she mentioned it, most of the items on display did appear to be

medicine and the like. *Lewin's Arms and Armor Shop in the Western Town Square, huh? Got it.*

I'd been having a hard time deciding where to sell my homemade medicine and potions, but perhaps here was as good as anyplace. She seemed trustworthy enough, and would probably buy them for a high price if the quality was good. I selected a low-grade potion from my inventory and showed it to the young woman.

"Hey, do you buy this sort of stuff?"

"Ooh, did you make that?"

"Yeah."

"I see. A three-star low-grade potion, eh? Not bad. I can buy it for 250 G."

"Huh? That much? I'll take it!"

One-star low-grade potions were being sold at 200 G apiece. Sure, my potion might have a three-star rating, but if she were offering to buy it for 250 G, just how much did she intend on selling it for?

"The prices go up even further in the next town. You can sell this stuff like hotcakes there, since anything *above* three stars is still pretty rare."

That meant that some people were already doing business in the next town. Damn, I really *was* behind everyone else.

"Wouldn't it be cheaper to just buy two cheap potions, though?"

"It's because of the cooldown. High-potency potions are a lot more useful in a tight battle."

That made sense. Since potions had a ten-minute cooldown, good luck using them multiple times during battle. So, the more HP you could recover at once, the better.

"So you know the market price in other towns as well?"

"That's right. It's our area of specialization, after all."

"Specialization? I didn't know there was a job like that."

"Not so much a job as a hobby. I'm a Merchant. Our clan acts as an

information broker of sorts.”

Clans referred to player-made groups which existed for friends or people with similar goals to help each other out. This was a built-in game mechanism, and there were apparently even some clan-exclusive quests and items.

“Members of our clan, the Quick-Eared Cats, are certified information dealers.”

“You’ve already formed a clan? Were you in the beta test?”

“Who knooows? Well, I’m an information broker, so I might just tell you, if *you* tell me a little about yourself.”

Wow, an actual information broker! The sky was truly the limit in LJO. The woman’s mischievous smile was putting me in a playful mood myself. What kind of information did she want from me, though? I supposed a standard self-introduction was as good a place as any to start.

“I’m Yuto. I’m a Tamer in this game and an office worker in real life. My total amount of initial bonus points was 186.”

The woman chuckled heartily at my introduction.

“Ha ha. Not every day that you meet someone who tells you that sort of nitty gritty.”

Oops. Guess I got a little carried away there.

“Are you sure you want my information, though?” I asked.

“Of course. You seem interesting.”

“Interesting? How so?”

“Well, you’re a Tamer, aren’t you? If you got that many initial bonus points, that means you’re not a beta tester, but here you are already crafting three-star potions. There’s something different about you... I don’t see your monster anywhere either.”

The fact that she was able to deduce all that from merely what I’d told her so far was impressive. It was a sure sign that her information could be trusted.

“Okay, I’ll tell you a little about myself too. My name’s Alyssa, and my shop is

called Alyssa's Everything Store. Like you guessed, the Quick-Eared Cats is a clan that's made up entirely of beta testers. Most of the players are ex-frontliners too."

"Impressive. What are you doing running a stall in the Town of Beginnings, then?"

It was odd considering most of the beta testers had already moved on to the next town on the first day.

"Well, you know. Reasons."

"What do you mean by th— Oh, right..."

Alyssa flashed me a grin. I supposed that meant I had to offer something else in exchange.

I didn't have any information that was of much value, though... Actually, scratch that. I did. I was confident almost no one knew about "that." However, I had to make sure my secret was safe. I didn't want anyone else to find out.

"...This is between you and me, okay?"

"Don't worry. I won't sell your information without your consent."

"Well, to tell you the truth, I obtained a title yesterday."

"Is that so? I like how straightforward you are; it makes things much easier. I see. You're the Silver-Haired Pioneer, aren't you?"

One look at my appearance and she had figured me out immediately.

"I am."

I was beginning to feel a bit embarrassed, considering the nature of my title. Judging from her expression, however, she didn't appear to be mocking me. Her smile seemed to be one of amusement, but I didn't sense any malice from it.

"All right," she chuckled. "My turn, then. Our clan was right on the frontlines during the beta. We all had different tastes and hobbies, but one thing we shared in common was curiosity. We wanted to explore every inch of LJO, visit unknown lands, and discover things we hadn't known. That was our motivation and purpose."

“Yeah, I sort of get that.”

“You do, don’t you? Unfortunately, our efforts turned out to be futile. After working tirelessly for two weeks, we managed to clear less than one hundredth of the full game. We came to the conclusion that it simply wasn’t enough to be on the frontlines if we wanted to discover every detail about this world.”

“So that’s why you decided to become information brokers?”

“Exactly. We had already been dealing in information, but we decided to take things to the next level starting with the official launch.”

“I’m surprised you can make any money. Considering there are forums and all.”

I doubted that many people would bother buying information when you could just look something up online. It seemed that Alyssa had already taken that into account, though.

“Well, we’re not really doing this for money. And besides, you’d be surprised to know how many people avoid checking the forums because of how seriously they take their role-playing.”

While I could sort of see the appeal of LARPing like that, I highly doubted I could survive by relying on information brokers alone, fun as the idea was.

“We get a lot of those types of players. A lot of folks also want their info pronto, so they’ll buy information from us in conjunction with using online forums. So, I’d say we break even. It was like that during the beta phase too.”

The clan’s main objective was information, not profit, so I guessed they were content as long as they weren’t operating at a huge loss.

“So, if you have any information worth sharing, I’ll buy it from you. If you want the deets on something, I can sell it to you too.”

“Um, one question. What’s the market price for info like?”

“Hmm. We’re the only ones doing this at the moment, so I guess it depends on us. Prices might go up, or they might go down.”

Duh. Information was a fickle thing, after all. Obviously, the prices would fluctuate from time to time.

“You decide if the price is right.”

Alyssa extended her hand towards me in a dramatic gesture and smiled.

The issue was whether I could actually trust her and her clan, although I had a feeling that I could. Their brokering business wouldn’t fare well if there were uncomfortable rumors about their prices, so surely they couldn’t be that outrageous.

Honestly, this whole thing had piqued my interest. I was excited to get in on the information game. Unfortunately, I didn’t have any money on hand at the moment, so I would have to sell something and make some cash first. But what information could I sell...? Wait a minute. I totally had some deets worth selling!

“I’d like to sell several pieces of information.”

“Oho. You’re telling me you’ve got something good? A beginner like you? Well, I suppose I can guess what one of those pieces of info pertains to.”

“Yes. It’s about my title.”

That’s right. I hadn’t revealed the details of my title yet. I assumed this news ought to be at least slightly rare.

“Knew it. Man, I’m glad I could catch you of all people!”

“Um, it’s not that big of a deal.”

At the end of the day, it was just a joke title, with no noteworthy special abilities. Regardless, Alyssa continued beaming at me.

“Doesn’t matter. Learning the details of a unique title is enough for me.”

“Well, if you say so.”

“I can buy that information for 1,000 G.”

“Huh? Are you serious? That much?”

I had figured the most I would get was 100 G. This was a surprise.

“I’m giving you a bit of a bonus since you’re a first-time customer, but it’s mostly because you’re the only person who has concrete evidence to share about this. Besides, this information will allow me to make some educated guesses about the other two players’ titles, which is pretty useful.”

“Is that so?”

“It might feel like a huge sum right now, but I promise you it’ll start to feel more like pocket change sooner or later.”

Regardless, 1,000 G was a fortune for me at the moment. I immediately opened my status window and showed Alyssa the section regarding my title, Silver-Haired Pioneer.

“I see. So no stat bump.”

“Nope. Just money, points, and a new skill. See, I told you it wasn’t that big of a deal.”

“I wouldn’t say that at all. Thanks for sharing that valuable nugget of information with me. I appreciate it. By the way, if this had been exclusive, game-breaking information, it would’ve been worth even more. This hardly counts as expensive.”

I could already feel my spending habits going out the window. I supposed 1,000 G wasn’t all that much money to beta testers.

“There’s more, isn’t there?” she prompted.

“I have some news concerning monsters too. It’s about a change that’s been implemented since the official launch.”

“Oh?”

“You know how there are gnomes in this game? They only appeared from Zone Three onwards in the beta test, but with the official launch, they’ve become available in Zone Two as well.”

“Really? That’s quite a valuable piece of info, you know? Where did you learn that, anyway?” Alyssa cocked her head at me.

Her skepticism was totally justified. After all, who would believe that a low-level idiot who’s already died three times would know anything about monsters in Zone Two?

“Take a look at this,” I told Alyssa, showing her my status screen once more.

The word “gnome” was listed under my Tamed Monsters section, which

ought to back up my claim more than anything. That did appear to be enough to convince her.

“I see. So you acquired Advanced Tame, huh?” she nodded with satisfaction.

“You sure know your stuff.”

“I couldn’t call myself an information broker if I didn’t even know that much.”

“You believe me then?”

“I do. You have solid proof, after all. I’ll pay you 300 G.”

Pretty good sum for such a vague testimony.

“If it had been a minor change in details, I would have only paid you 100 G, but gnomes are a pretty troublesome opponent. Their earth magic is powerful, and they’re fast runners. They’ll destroy you if it’s your first time encountering them. I’m pretty sure a lot of players got their asses kicked by gnomes during the beta phase, but they’re worth fighting for the item drops. Not sure if that’s still the case now, though. Knowing that they also appear in Zone Two is a pretty valuable detail. If you had intel on their exact location as well, I would have paid you 5,000 G.”

No way. I would’ve been content with selling just one piece of information; I hadn’t been expecting to make even this much money.

“Okay, I’d like to buy something this time.”

“Sure thing. What do you want to know?”

“I want to know more about gnomes. Like how they attack, for example.”

“That’ll be 500 G.”

“That’s fine with me.”

“During the beta phase, gnomes were one of the monsters that appeared in the abandoned mine in the latter half of Zone Three. They were a tough enemy to deal with—earth magic for long-range attacks and wooden clubs for melee. Their most-feared attack was known as the Pitfall, an earth magic skill that makes the ground beneath your feet cave in. Most players got thrown off balance by this move and then were clobbered to death. Chances of dying on

your first encounter were more than ninety percent.”

“Damn, that’s rough. Kinda weird, though.”

“Oh? What makes you say that?”

“My gnome doesn’t seem to have any combat abilities.”

Not only did Olto not attack with his earth magic, he couldn’t even make the ground cave in.

“Ah, got it. It was the same during the beta test. Apparently, some monsters change in temperament once they’re tamed.”

I had no idea. I’d have to be more careful from now on. If I tamed another powerful monster only to find out that it specialized in crafting things I would lose my mind.

“By the way, did you say their item drops were good?”

“Yes, especially their rare drops. They’re called earth crystals.”

“Earth crystals?”

“You can add them on to weapons to give them bonus attributes, use them to make wrought gold, and so on. They’re incredibly versatile. They’re several times more effective than ores, the item a rank below them, so they were highly sought after by crafter types. The drop rate was pretty cruel though—less than 0.01 percent—which was why it was sometimes known as a legendary item during the beta. The drop rate for ores was one hundred percent, though, so there were quite a few parties that devoted themselves to hunting gnomes.”

“I see. That was super helpful, thanks. I’d like to buy one more piece of information, if you don’t mind.”

“I’m all ears.”

“I’d like to know what sort of cultivable items you can gather in this area. Not just plants, but trees too.”

I figured I might as well ask that while I was here. I wanted to know what other items I could pick besides the ones I had obtained already.

“That’ll be 300 G.”

“Deal.”

“You can find blue acorns and red panther caps in the Southern and Western Forests. You can also pick green peaches in the Western Forest, but I don’t recommend it since you’ll have to go pretty deep, plus it’s not guaranteed that you’ll find them. Oh yes, you can find glowing walnuts in the Southern Forest too. These are even harder to obtain than green peaches.”

“Glowing walnuts?”

“That’s right. They occasionally grow on regular walnut trees, although it’s hard to tell them apart since they look like ordinary walnuts on the outside. It’s easier to find them at night when they emit a faint glow, but the forest also becomes far more dangerous at night. I recommend you attempt the Southern Forest when you’re level 12 or above if going solo.”

“Level 12, eh...? That’s a nope for me.”

I would have loved to get my hands on a glowing walnut, but it seemed like I would most definitely die if I attempted it. I would have to abandon that idea for now.

“Thanks for all your help.”

“No problem. I’ll be seeing you around.”

I said goodbye to Alyssa, and left her store behind. So far, the day had been time well spent, and now I was 5,850 G richer!

Online Forum [I’d Kill For A Title] A Discussion Thread for Ever-Elusive “Titles,” Pt. 1

Wanted: Information on how to obtain titles.

You are also welcome to simply post the effects of titles.

For speculation on what sort of titles there might be, please refer to the thread made specifically for that purpose.

14: Kainz

>11

Dishonorable mention or not, I would kill to get my hands on a title this early in the game. That Silver-Haired Pioneer is a lucky son of a gun!

15: Kitaro

Totally. There were a handful of titles available in the beta phase too, and they were all pretty good.

16: Kurumi

Here’s one that I know of from the beta, provided that they haven’t made any changes with the official launch:

The Friendly Neighborhood Helper

Requirement: Successfully complete over fifty Errand side quests in a single town.

Effect: Slight increase in side quest reward amounts,

Strength +1, Agility +1

17: Keropi

Obviously everyone wants a title. Did you find any others in the beta?

18: Kurumi

We found about seven, I think? No more than ten, anyway. So it was a pretty generous move on the devs' part to release three new ones all at once.

19: Kainz

Are there deets on any of the beta titles on the information board?

20: Kurumi

Yeah, several.

21: Kainz

Personally, I'd like to learn more about the three secret achievement titles. I wonder if the title holders will come forward?

22: Kurumi

Ruby Red and Purple-Haired might, but I highly doubt Comrade Silver-Haired will. It isn't exactly a title worth boasting about, after all.

23: Kitaro

Why 'Comrade'?

24: Kurumi

I just felt like the Silver-Haired Pioneer warranted an

honorific term. I mean, you gotta respect the fella lol

25: Keropi

Comrade Silver-Haired: “Your sympathy is uncalled for! Do not pity me!”

26: Kitaro

Lol what do you know about Comrade Silver-Haired?

Also, why’d you make him sound like a general

27: Coriander

>21

I doubt they’ll be posting anything for free.

28: Keropi

Whaddya mean?

29: Coriander

I think they’re more likely to sell their info to the Quick-Eared Cats than post in the forums.

30: Keropi

The Quick-Eared Cats? Sell info? What are you talking about?

31: Kurumi

They’re a clan of information dealers that’ve been around since the beta phase, the only ones. If you bring them exclusive information, they’ll buy it off you. Looks like they’ve decided to continue the brokering business in the official version too. I checked.

Since they have access to important tips and strategies, you might be able to buy rare tidbits of info from them. The more valuable the information, the higher the price. I’m sure they have the lowdown on the titles as well.

32: Kainz

Is that such a good idea, though? If everyone starts withholding information and stops posting, those Quick-Eared Cats are gonna catch hell.

33: Coriander

They have their critics, but most of the beta players just accepted them.

Anyway, anyone who’d try to monopolize information is usually swayed by short-term gains, so they’ll sell whatever they know to information brokers if it means money.

By that token, information given to the Quick-Eared Cats can only spread from there. They actually play a pretty crucial role if you think about it.

Besides, they upload their data, including major hacks, to their knowledge base once they break even, so kicking up a fuss about their confidentiality is pretty pointless. If you really want to know something pronto, you can just buy it from them.

34: Keropi

Damn, sounds impressive. Maybe I’ll pay them a visit sometime.

Only problem is I don’t actually have anything to sell lol

35: Kurumi

It’s still a fun experience even if you’re just buying, so why don’t you go?

36: Kainz

It’d be nice if they had information regarding the Silver-Haired Pioneer.

37: Kurumi

I mean, we don’t even know if Comrade Silver-Haired knows about the Quick-Eared Cats.

38: Coriander

What kind of lunatic dies *three* times on the first day? Come on, they’ve got to be a beta tester. I bet they were part of the verification team, which means there’s no way they wouldn’t know about the Quick-Eared Cats.

39: Kainz

Hmm. You do have a point.

40: Keropi

Isn’t there a slight possibility that they’re actually just a newbie who messed up their character build?

41: Kitaro

Nah, unlikely.

42: Kurumi

Nuh-uh.

43: Keropi

I guess not, huh?

[Information Regarding Zone Two] Zone Two Megathread

88: Harold

So the Humming Forest at the end of the Eastern Plains for insect items?

89: Hinako

Lightweight items, yes. If you want heavy armor-type items, you should check out the Forest of Horns at the end of the Southern Forest.

I highly recommend Atlas beetle horns and black beetle shells.

90: Fluffy

I need some wood. What’s the Forest of Horns like?

91: Hello

Same as the Southern Forest; it’s mostly beech trees.

It’s supposedly easier to obtain higher-quality items, though.

92: Harold

Wood? How do you get your hands on that? I hunted a ton in the Southern Forest, and I never managed to obtain any.

Is wood not an item you can gather?

93: Fluffy

You need Logging skills to collect wood, and the

appropriate tools. Just like how you need Mining skills and a pickax to dig up ores.

94: Hello

Same with fishing. You need Fishing skills and a fishing rod.

95: Holmes

You can uncover item collection spots if you possess complementary skills.

96: Harold

Got it! I don’t have any Mining skills though, how have I been getting ores?

97: Fluffy

Everyone can see gathering nodes as long as one of the party members possesses a skill that corresponds to it, so it’s probably a good idea to divvy up what skills your team plans to acquire.

98: Harold

Come to think of it, one of my party members *did* have a Mining skill!

99: Holmes

If you want wood, you should get a Logging skill. You’re more likely to obtain high-quality wood if you have one.

100: Hello

So I heard that you can obtain wood from the green peach trees in the Western Forest, but I’ve never managed to get any from them, despite having a Logging skill. Is that just

a false rumor?

101: Holmes

Apparently, it has to do with your skill level. You can cut down peach trees once you hit Logging level 21+.

Incidentally, there’s no downside to cutting them, since they grow back fairly quickly. You can’t make consecutive cuts, though.

102: Hello

I didn’t know that. Gotcha, I’ll work on leveling up my Logging skill!

***

Sweet. I had money now, which meant I could go buy some armor.

According to the information broker, Alyssa, the arms and armor shop was supposed to be located in the Western Town Square. Could it be a player-run shop?

“Guess there’s only one way to find out.”

I arrived at the Western Town Square. It was my first time setting foot in the place, and I couldn’t help but marvel at the number of people. Perhaps because it was so close to the Western Forest, there were far more players here than there were in the Southern Town Square.

“That must be it.”

The shop in question stood out like a sore thumb. Spears stood erect all along the sides of the store, making it obvious even from a distance that it was a weapon shop.

As I approached the stall, I noticed a short and stocky middle-aged man sitting cross-legged on a straw mat beside a precariously stacked mountain of weapons. The anvil and hammer next to him implied he was a blacksmith as well. *Talk about intimidating.* I felt like I would get yelled at if I so much as greeted him. There didn’t seem to be any other weapon shops nearby, however, so I had no choice but to approach him.

“Um... Is this Lewin’s Arms and Armor Shop?” I shakily called out to the man.

“Yep, you’ve got it. Someone tell ya ’bout my little shop?” he replied, no menace in his voice despite his lack of expression.

“Yeah. Alyssa told me about you.”

“Well, I’ll never turn down a referral from Miss Alyssa. The name’s Lewin. Nice to meet ya.”

It was obvious that Lewin, a dwarf, was a player, not an NPC. Out of the various character races that players could choose, dwarfs were one of the few that didn’t automatically result in a beautified avatar. Female characters were apparently granted a short, childlike appearance, but men were doomed to be

grizzled, stout, burly, and bearded. Lewin appeared to be roughly the same height as me.

“Are you with the Quick-Eared Cats too?”

“How’d ya guess? Yep, that’s right. I’m in charge of blacksmithing.”

I had to hand it to Alyssa—she sure was good at doing business. No wonder she was so eager to give this recommendation. Not that I minded, though. The very fact that Lewin was a dwarf was enough to make him look like a master blacksmith. Dwarfs gave off a reliable vibe, and the fact that he was a member of the Quick-Eared Cats meant that he was also a former beta tester. He seemed more than trustworthy.

“I’d like some armor.”

“Yeah, I bet. You know, young fella...”

“Yuto.”

“I was pretty shocked to see ya walkin’ around without any protection, Yuto.”

My sleeveless tunic apparently made it obvious to the trained eye that I was unarmored.

“Yeah, some stuff happened. So, do you have any robes? I’d like to check out the staffs too, if you have any.”

“Gotcha. We’ll start with the robe. What’s your budget like?”

“Roughly fifty-eight hundred, max.”

Not that I intended to spend all of it.

“I see. More money doesn’t necessarily mean you get better gear, though.”

“Equipment requirements, right?”

“Precisely. I’m sure ya know this, but your stats need to be above a certain level in order to equip certain items. The more advanced the gear, the higher your stats need to be. You’re at level 3 now, right?”

“Yes.”

“Right, so this thing here costs 5,000 G, but ya can only wear it if your base

level is 7 or higher.”

Lewin shook his head sadly. You could assess other people’s levels and job classes by using your Appraisal skill, though names were displayed as *????* until you introduced yourselves to each other.

He made a flicking motion in the air, and a virtual shop window popped up before me. Apparently the physical items in the stall were only for display, with the real transactions completed on-screen. The very sci-fi vibe of the holographic, translucent virtual window felt out of place for a fantasy setting, but I couldn’t complain about the convenience.

“Okay, how about this one?” I asked, tapping on a 4,500 G robe displayed on the screen.

The robe I selected popped up in a separate window, along with a full view of it and its abilities.

“Ah, that one’s a bit heavy. Your Endurance and Strength need to be a combined total of 12. Can ya handle it?”

“...Nope.”

“I figured. Guessing yer a rearguard, yeah? Let’s see, how ’bout this one? It’s 1,900 G.”

This one was a beautiful blue and white robe. I immediately tapped on it to view its details.

Name: Blue Robin Robe

Rarity: 2 *Quality: 4*★ Durability: 100

Effect: Defense +9, minor water resistance.

Requirement: Strength 2 or higher.

Weight: 1

“Blue Robin?”

“A bird with white and blue feathers, s’posed to be a pretty little thing. This

robe's probably named after it for the colors."

"Never heard of it."

"I hear you can even see 'em in Japan if ya head down south. Not that I've actually seen one myself."

"Wow, this is great. Nice and light too."

While it wasn't as good as the Silver Robe I had initially possessed, it was still pretty decent for beginner's gear. Its Defense score was much higher than the robes sold in NPC-owned shops, too, and the weight was low.

To elaborate, all equipment had a Weight value. If this number outweighed the total of your Strength and Endurance, your Agility and Dexterity would suffer greatly, so it was especially important for rearguard players to keep this number in mind.

For reference, the stats of my initial gear had been as follows:

Name: Silver Robe

Rarity: 3 *Quality: 3*★ Durability: 100

Effect: Defense +24, slightly magic-resistant.

Weight: 3

Hmm, what to do? A higher Defense score would be ideal "Anything with metal incorporated?" I asked.

"No can do. Iron is heavy. It'd bump the weight up quite a bit."

"I see. Guess that's out of the question for a weak-ass rearguard like me."

"You in particular. You're as weak as they come."

"You don't have to rub it in!"

Damn, Lewin! Talk about cold!

"Hey, ya said it yerself. Quit mopin' around."

"Sorry, bad habit."

“Well, here’s the deal with equipment made out of metal; you can make it lighter, but the price goes way up with it. 5,800 G wouldn’t cut it.”

It appeared that shaving off a few pounds wasn’t simply a matter of making the item thinner; there were additional costs involved.

“Okay. Forget it, then,” I replied. It was important to know when to give up.

“A wise decision.”

“Hmm, what now?”

I was still concerned about the Blue Robin Robe’s lower Defense.

“Well, how ’bout this?” Lewin suggested, pointing at a pair of shoes that appeared at first glance to be made of black leather.

“Shoes?”

“Foot armor.”

Name: Hard Leather Shoes

Rarity: 1 *Quality: 4*★ Durability: 120

Effect: Defense +5, minor poison resistance.

Requirement: Strength 3 or higher.

Weight: 1

Not bad. Pairing these with the robe would probably make up for the latter’s low Defense stats.

“Looks good! How much?”

“That’ll be 1,100 G. This is a player-made item and has the added benefit of the poison resistance, so it costs a bit more.”

“Gotcha. Weight’s not bad, though.”

“Right? What’s your Strength and Endurance total right now?”

“Five.”

“Huh. That’s low.”

“Yeah, I guess.”

“Well then, what do you think of this?”

Name: Bronze Necklace

Rarity: 1 *Quality: 2*★ Durability: 100

Effect: Defense +1

Weight: 1

“It’s one of the least effective accessories, but I’ll throw it in for free if ya buy the Blue Robin Robe and the leather shoes. This too.”

Name: Cedar Staff

Rarity: 1 *Quality: 2*★ Durability: 100

Effect: Attack +3, Magic +3

Weight: 1

There were two items before me: a plain bronze necklace and an ornate staff. The staff was made of dark wood, painted a solid black color with a hooklike curve at the end. The feather and blue piece of cloth attached to it gave it a stylish flair.

“It’s less functional than other items, so I spent a lot of time tweaking its appearance. No one wants to buy it still.”

“I see.”

Admittedly, it didn’t rank highly in terms of performance, but it was still more than enough for a non-combatant like me.

“You said you’ll throw it in for free? Are you sure?”

“Well, Alyssa sent ya. Besides, that thing is a prototype, so to speak. It’s made from the lowest-quality ingredients you can get, all stuff from around the entrance of the Western Forest.”

The entrance of the Western Forest? I’d been there myself, but I didn’t remember finding any wood. I asked Lewin about it; apparently I needed a skill called Logging. Allegedly, certain types of gathering nodes wouldn’t even appear unless you had the right types of skills. Did that mean Olto’s Digging skill would let him find ore? I’d assumed it would only come in handy for digging up dirt, but it might just prove to have some actual use. I made a mental note to visit the mines with him sometime.

“I *guess* I’ll take you up on that then.”

“Come on, don’t mope about it. You make me feel bad. This stuff’s at least slightly better than beginner’s gear.”

“It’s good enough for me.”

“Ya sure?”

“Definitely, I mean, compared to *this*?!” I said, whipping out the wooden stick that I was currently using.

“Hang on, this is literally *just a stick*. Are you some kind of expert playin’ with a handicap?”

Lewin started mumbling incoherently under his breath, clearly taken aback. Terrified of what he must think of me, I decided to skedaddle before he changed his mind and asked for his items back.

“So, I can take these?” I confirmed.

“B-Be my guest.”

Hehe, farewell, wooden stick! You’ve served me well!

I was now down to 2,850 G, though. Was it just me, or was I spending my money way too fast? My cash flow seemed to be moving at an alarming pace.

“Guess I’ll have to make some more... That reminds me, I gotta take Olto by the guild.”

If I completed some special quests, I’d be able to earn cash and XP. I hurried back to my farm.

Chapter Three: Different Strokes for Different Folks

Having gotten my hands on new gear, I returned to our plot of land to find Olto sitting with his back against the well. I watched him wipe his sweat away with his Earth Spirit's Scarf, looking for all the world like a young boy hard at work in the fields. All he needed was a straw hat to complete the look.

"How's it going, Olto?"

"Mm? Mm-mm."

"You seem bored."

It looked like he'd already finished sowing all of the seeds I'd given him. There were a variety of plants sprouting, which I was able to distinguish by the green markers above each sprout.

"Mm?" Olto cocked his head to the side and tugged at the hem of my robe, apparently curious about the new digs.

"Oh, this thing? I just bought it. Pretty cool, huh?"

"Mm." Olto nodded vigorously in response.

"So, you done with the farm?"

"Mm!" Olto raised his hand in salute. Damn, he really *was* adorable.

If he was done farming for the day, I figured it ought to be fine to take him to the Magical Beasts Guild, so the two of us set off to complete some quest requirements.

"Mm-mm, mm-mm." Olto hummed a tune as he skipped. He seemed to be enjoying our outing.

"You're in high spirits."

"Mm!"

It was then that I remembered something important.

"That's right, I haven't fed you yet today."

I selected a honey dumpling from my inventory and handed it to Olto.

“Here, eat this. How is it?”

“Mmm...” Olto mumbled.

Olto nibbled tentatively on the dumpling, a clear dissatisfaction on his face. *Hang in there, buddy, I’ll get you something nicer to eat soon.*

“*Your Command ability has leveled up.*”

Hey, nice! It looked like you could gain skill XP just by traveling with your monster. I’d have to take Olto out more often.

We arrived at the Magical Beasts Guild in no time. I couldn’t help stealing glances at Olto along the way; he was just too darn cute for words.

“This is it.”

“Mm.”

“Let’s go check out the quest board.”

With Olto in tow, I could tick off several boxes at once.

“I’ve brought my monster with me, Barbara,” I called out to the receptionist.

“My! A gnome, and a unique specimen at that! Hmm, it looks like it’s acquired both a rare skill and an EX skill—Arboriculture and Forced Cultivation EX.” Barbara squealed at Olto, pure delight on her face.

I decided to overlook her occasional pats atop Olto’s head, since he didn’t seem to mind it. I had to say, though, it still killed me a little inside to see a gorgeous girl like Barbara losing her shit over a gnome like this.

“Phew. Thanks, that was lovely! Consider your quests fulfilled.”

“*You have successfully completed this quest. You will now receive your reward.*”

“*Your base level has increased to level 4. You have acquired two bonus points.*”

“*Your Job level has increased to level 4.*”

No surprise there; I’d just completed three special quests at once. My in-game

currency had also increased to 11,350 G. There didn't seem to be any more special quests that I could immediately fulfill, however, so this was probably the last advantage I could take of my initial bonuses.

"*Your Tamed Monster, Olto, has leveled up.*"

"Mmm!"

"You too, Olto?!"

A double level-up, *and* a ton of money. Seriously, special quests were the bomb.

"What should we buy with all this? Hmm... What do you think, Olto?"

Ha ha, as if Olto would actually answer me... I thought, until I noticed Olto trying to catch my attention.

"Mm, mm-mm."

"What's up?"

He brought both hands together above his head and repeatedly made a downward swinging motion.

"Pounding mochi?" I offered.

Nope, that wasn't it. Olto held his hands up in an X in front of his chest and shook his head.

"Consecutive powerbombs."

"Mm."

"Kendo swings?"

"Mm-mm."

That wasn't it either. What on earth was he trying to tell me...?

"Hm, what now?"

Olto seemed to sense that this was going nowhere and changed motions.

"You're pushing a button..."

"Mm-mm."

“No? You’re poking a hole into something, then?”

“Mmm!”

Olto thrust his thumb and forefinger out dramatically in my direction as if to say *Yes, you nailed it!* Why the JoJo pose, though?

“You’re making a hole and placing something in—oh, you’re sowing seeds!”

“Mm!”

Bingo.

“So, that gesture just now... You were miming a hoe?”

“Mm!”

So putting that all together, what he was telling me was...

“You want a *farm*?”

“Mm-mm!”

Man, he sure knew how to wrap me around his little finger! Farms didn’t come cheap, but...how could I possibly say no when he was staring up at me with those puppy-dog eyes?

Damn it, devs! This is how you plan on making me spend more money, eh?!

“Listen, Olto...”

“Mm...”

Olto apparently sensed my reservation. He hung his head dejectedly and turned his back on me, before kicking a pebble at his feet. Could he get any cuter?! That said, though, perhaps buying a proper farm wasn’t such a bad idea. If I mass-produced potions and sold them by the dozen, I’d be able to rake in the cash, and it’d help me level up my skills too. It might take some time to recover the initial investment, but that didn’t seem too difficult a task otherwise.

“Hmm...”

“Mm?”

Olto seemed to sense that I was wavering as he glanced back at me.

“Do you really want a farm?”

“Mm!”

“I see.”

“Mmm...”

Olto clung to my leg and gazed up at me with a pleading look in his eyes. Now *that* was what I called a killer move. *Just look at that face!* How could I win against that?!

“Shall we buy one then?” I caved.

“Mm?” Olto looked at me questioningly.

“I mean, you are pretty good at growing.”

“Mm-mm!”

Olto rolled up his sleeves as if to show his determination.

“All right, let’s do it!” I exclaimed.

“Mmm!”

As we started to leave the Magical Beasts Guild, I heard someone laughing. I turned around to find a blonde-haired elf girl roughly my height, chuckling with her hand over her mouth. She was a Tamer, with two tamed monsters, and her gaze was very obviously directed at me.

I guessed we’d been too loud. Embarrassed, I decided to leave before I attracted any more attention.

“Aren’t you a weird one?” the girl smirked.

However, my escape was thwarted; the girl was already approaching me.

“I mean, farms are pretty expensive. They’re not something you just decide to buy on a whim. Don’t you agree, Nagamasa and Tadataka?”

“*Grunt.*”

“*Squawk!*”

Her two monsters were Nagamasa, a tortoise the size of a compact car, and Tadataka, a creature resembling a bald eagle, which was perched atop the girl’s

shoulder. Hell of a name for some monsters. Was she some kind of history nerd? She was probably a beta tester, though. I'd never seen either of these monsters before.

"Well, seemed like a necessary purchase," I replied.

"I've never seen anyone talk like that with their monster before," the girl chuckled.

"No?"

Hmm, she didn't seem like a bad person. I supposed she was probably just chatting me up on a whim. She reminded me a little of Alyssa, although she appeared younger than her.

"Wouldn't expect less from the Silver-Haired Pioneer. You're not like other players, are you?"

What...did she just say? I could've sworn I heard her speak that infamous title of mine. Or had I just imagined it?

"Um, come again?"

"I said, wouldn't expect less from the Silver-Haired Pioneer!"

So my ears *weren't* playing tricks!

"H-How do you know about my title...?"

Sure, my hair was silver, but she couldn't have guessed my identity from that alone, right? I thought she had just taken a stab in the dark at first, but she seemed pretty sure of herself.

Could it be Alyssa? Was she selling my information? But she *promised* she would keep it between us! Crap, my secret was bound to spread like wildfire at this rate.

"Hey, where did you hear that?" I asked again.

"Huh? I found out from a woman at a stall..."

Yep, that settled it. I had seriously underestimated how money-hungry those Cats could be! I never thought Alyssa would leak my personal information *that* easily.

“Sorry, gotta run. Let’s go, Olto.”

“Mm.”

“Hey, wait up!”

“Catch you later!”

I could chat with my fellow Tamers later. First, I had to shut Alyssa up!

Olto and I raced through the bustling city streets.

It was probably inevitable that I, as a titleholder, would attract some attention, and I did dream of fame and VIP status as much as the next person. However, I had no interest in becoming known for *that* title.

“Alyssa!” I yelled, rushing towards her stall the moment I spotted it.

“Hey again, Yuto. It’s been, what, two hours?” Alyssa replied, showing me a friendly smile. *Nice try,* I thought, *but I’m not going to fall for that!*

“You’re selling my information, aren’t you?!” I grilled, putting on the scariest expression I could manage.

“No, I’m not.”

“Bullshit! I ran into someone who knew about my title! They told me they got the information from a woman running a stall.”

“But there are plenty of women running stalls.”

Okay, she did have a point there.

“Anyway, information brokers have rules, or rather common courtesy, I should say. We especially make it a point never to sell our clients’ personal details. The only thing I’m selling is information about the title itself—cross my heart. It is a hot-ticket item, after all.”

“But you’re about the only player who knows my secret!”

“Are you sure about that?” Alyssa smiled wryly.

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“You’re in luck, my friend. This news is hot off the press; I just got it a few minutes ago. Do you want to know about the woman who’s giving out your

information to other people?”

“A-Absolutely. I’ll buy it.”

“Don’t be silly, I won’t charge you for this.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course. As a self-proclaimed information dealer, I can’t overlook this sort of harassment.”

Nice! Talk about reliable!

“So, who is it?”

“Calm down now.”

“Hurry up and tell me!” I urged. My embarrassing secret could be making the rounds this very minute.

“Just a sec, I’m marking it on the map for you... Okay, all done. You know that there are stalls in the Southern Town Square too, yeah?”

“Kind of. I’ve seen them before.”

“There’s a stall there called Mirei’s Apothecary, which appears to be the source. Here’s the location.”

“Mirei’s Apothecary. Location: the square with the clock tower,” I read.

Mirei... I pondered the familiar-sounding name, and then remembered—she was that hottie who was advertising her shop on the first day! I was certain she had called herself Mirei.

“It’s a store run by a pink-haired weredog girl,” Alyssa informed me.

It sounded like my hunch was correct.

“Got it. I’ll pay her a visit,” I said, bidding farewell to Alyssa.

“I’ll see you around!” I heard Alyssa call after me as I took off again, weaving through the crowd of pedestrians and heading for the Southern Town Square. I came to a screeching halt, however, as I very nearly collided with someone.

LJO had a system known as a harassment block—a measure designed to prevent sexual harassment towards women—which placed a barrier between

players to stop them from coming into physical contact with each other unless they were friends in-game. Therefore, I couldn't *actually* have bumped into the people, but you know, reflexes.

"Sorry," I courteously apologized to the two men in front of me before turning around to leave, but it seemed the men had other plans.

"Not so fast," said one.

"So I'm guessing you're the Silver-Haired Pioneer?" asked the other.

The two guys blocked my way, smirking.

"What?"

Unbelievable. How did they know who I was?

"Thought so," one of the men said. "Guess Mirei's intel was good: look for a silver-haired Tamer with a kid. That *has* to be you."

"Hey, fess up. *You're* the Silver-Haired Pioneer, aren't you?"

These dudes were obnoxious as hell, not to mention how jarring it was to see two avatars as handsome as theirs acting like common thugs.

"Eh, who knows? Anyway, I'm kinda in a hurry here."

"C'mon, just answer yes or no."

"Too good to talk to us, huh? You think you're so great just because you have a title."

Why the hell would I be proud of that *stupid title?! If anything, you're the ones with inflated egos! You think you can get away with anything just because this is a game, don't you?!* I thought at them, fuming.

I hated these kinds of assholes, the ones who acted big online but usually turned out to be average Joes with barely any presence in real life. I had no intention of voicing any of this aloud, though. Never mind them, I needed to get out of here.

"Sorry, gotta go."

"Hold up. Tell us what your title does."

“Huh? Even if I *was* the guy you’re looking for, how is that any of *your* business?”

“Yo, what’s with that glare?” asked one.

“Hurry up and spill the beans,” the other insisted. “What’s the big deal? You some kind of info hoarder?”

Well, clearly not, considering that I’d already told Alyssa everything. However, they had another thing coming if they thought they could get anything out of me with attitudes like that.

“C’mon, tell us.”

“Spill it.”

“If you think bossing me around is gonna get you anywhere, you’re dead wrong,” I spat. “See ya!”

Yikes, now I’d done it! *Look who’s getting an attitude now!* If this were a real-life scenario, I would’ve just faked a smile!

“Let’s go, Olto!”

“Mm!”

With that, we took off running.

“Why you...! Get back here!”

“Come back, you respawnin’ bastard!”

Since PKing wasn’t allowed in LJO, there was no way those dudes could hurt me, considering they couldn’t even touch me. Regardless, it was a chore to deal with idiots like them, so I figured my best course of action was to give them the slip. Although they had the upper hand in terms of speed, the streets of the town were labyrinthine, full of twists and turns. Taking a zigzagging path would keep them on their toes. After running for what seemed like ages, I finally seemed to have shaken the pair.

“Did we lose them?”

“Mm?”

Jeez, this is annoying. Anyway, I had to hurry to the square and put a stop to

Mirei's gossiping.

"Oh, looks like we actually ended up near the square. Let's go and see her."

"Mm-mm!"

I started sprinting again to the Southern Town Square, which was now packed with stalls, many more than on the first day. There were still only a handful of player-run shops, though. The apothecary was in the same spot as it had been yesterday. Even if it had moved, though, it would be impossible to miss, with Mirei hollering the words, "I have information regarding the Silver-Haired Pioneer!" at the top of her voice.

Several other players had gathered in front of the store, roaring with laughter at something the girl was showing them. Was it about me? Were they laughing at *me*? *Damn it, Mirei, how dare you?!*

As much as I wanted to storm in there this instant, I resisted the urge, lest I became a further laughing stock. *Patience, Yuto*, I told myself. Once the men had left, it was time to put things into motion. I approached Mirei's Apothecary slowly and calmly, hoping to remain inconspicuous.

"Step right up to Mirei's Apothecary for details about the one and only Silver-Haired Pioneer! I'll tell you everything you need to know about the holder of this joke of a title!"

J-Joke? Though, to be fair, she's not wrong.

"Hey!"

"Welco—" the girl began, but shut up immediately once she saw me, her face drained of color. That was a pretty neat graphical touch on LJO's part... Wait, now wasn't the time to be impressed. Back to the matter at hand.

"You seem to know who I am," I snapped.

"Heh heh," Mirei chuckled dryly, as if to laugh off the accusation. *Nice try, but I heard everything you said.*

"So you think this is funny?"

"I-I have no idea what you're talking about," she stammered.

“Quit trying to bluff your way out of it. I heard everything. Also, show me that screenshot you just hid.”

Mirei blinked at me helplessly, tears in her eyes. It was pretty cute, but I wasn’t about to fall for that kind of crap. I checked the pop-up that Mirei had on display, and sure enough, it was a picture of me standing in the square.

“So you *have* been talking about me.”

Mirei had been showing her customers a screenshot of me just after one of my respawns.

“That’s it, I’m making a GM call,” I snapped. This clearly went against gaming etiquette.

The GM here stood for Gamemaster, and referred to the managerial staff who oversaw and kept things running smoothly in-game. In other words, they were the moderators. GM calling was a function that allowed you to get in touch with the gamemasters to report serious bugs, as well as players who broke the game or etiquette rules. Typically, a GM’s workload and scope of authority varied significantly depending on the scale of the game; their main job in LJO was to crack down on players who violated the rules.

Now then, how would this girl react to a GM call? Would she fly off the handle? I wouldn’t forgive her if she did.

“I’m sorry!”

Surprisingly, she apologized, not even putting up a fight. I wasn’t going to let her off the hook that easily, though.

“You do realize that what you did is a breach of etiquette, right?”

“Uh-huh...”

“How many people did you tell?”

“Like, fifty?”

“*Fifty?!* Are you insane?!”

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry!”

“Why did you do this?!”

“I was trying to get a head start with my stall. I’m still new at this, so I was trying to figure out ways to sell my products, and I thought *maybe* I could get people to buy my stuff if I gave them an interesting tidbit of info as a bonus.”

Well, that was kind of understandable... But *hang on a sec*, why was I empathizing with her? Besides, I had yet to get to the crux of the matter.

“How did you learn about my secret?” I asked.

“I set up my stall yesterday and I’ve been here ever since. I didn’t get a lot of customers, so I was bored out of my mind, and decided to watch the square instead. You can see that there’s a pretty good view of the Obelisk of Return from here, right?”

The Obelisk of Return served as a checkpoint for those who died in the game. These stone monuments existed in all large towns as landmarks for respawning, assuming that players had pinned the location.

“I remembered you since you were the first to return. You stood out because you had a small boy with you. You then respawned two *more* times. Pretty hard to forget that.”

So *that* was how she figured it out. I supposed you *would* stand out if you respawned three times on the first day.

“I’ve got to say, though, even I didn’t expect how well it’d work. Everyone was dying to know who the joke title belonged to.”

“Joke...?”

“People were laughing their socks off. They couldn’t believe that anyone could seriously be that much of a loser. I was just like, ‘I know, right?!’ and everyone kept buying extra herbs and stuff! I’m telling you, business is booming!”

“...”

“Uh-oh.”

“Yeah, I’m gonna call the GMs.”

“I’m sorry! I swear I won’t do it anymore, please! If you call them they’re not gonna let me log back in!”

“Not being able to log in is probably the least of your worries.”

“But I don’t wanna get banned!” Mirei wailed.

“You brought this upon yourself!”

Turn on the waterworks all you want; I’m still not forgiving you... Also, what’re you all *looking at? I’m the one who’s been wronged, here!* I defended myself inwardly, sensing the judgmental stares of passersby.

“B-But I didn’t tell anyone your name or anything!”

“That’s because you don’t *know* my name!”

“Aw, c-come on, don’t be so mad. What do you say, huh?” Mirei cooed, trying to seduce me. She was having a hard time trying to hook her arm around mine, though, as again, players who hadn’t friended each other were unable to make physical contact.

“Damn it, I forgot we couldn’t touch.”

Did she think I wouldn’t catch that? Her true colors were shining through. It was already obvious from how she was trying to justify her rule breaking that she wasn’t a decent person, but it seemed she was even scummier than I’d imagined. Knowing that she couldn’t touch me, she now resorted to clasping her hands in front of her chest, edging as close to me as possible and smiling up at me sweetly.

“Forgive me. Pretty please?”

Damn was that adorable! What the heck? She was almost idol-level cute...

“Earth to Yuto. Stop thinking with the wrong head. This is just an avatar—it’s nothing but a heavily Photoshopped illusion!”

“What are you muttering about?”

Whoops. I hadn’t realized I’d been talking out loud.

“Are you okay?” Mirei asked, tilting her head slightly.

Gah! She definitely knew what she was doing!

This is an avatar. I repeat, this is an avatar. Besides, her personality is shit. She’s ugly as hell on the inside, I told myself.

“Phew.”

There, I’d cleared my mind and rid myself of worldly desires. *Temptation, begone!*

I glared again at Mirei, who seemed to realize that she’d failed to seduce me. Changing tactics, she picked up an item and pushed it towards me.

“*Mirei has sent you an item transfer request. Would you like to accept it?*”

“What do you say we let bygones be bygones?”

“Are you trying to bribe me?”

“Come ooon! Just press ‘Accept’! Please?”

Trying to placate me now, eh? I had no intention of accepting this pitiful peace offering, however. It was mostly filled with medicinal herbs and the like, not a single rare or expensive item. It was glaringly obvious that she hoped to sweep the matter under the rug with this; there was not a trace of remorse on her face.

“O-Okay, I’ll compensate you! That should make us even, right? Please! Here, you can have these too!” Seeming to have noticed my icy stare, Mirei sent another item transfer request, pleading desperately.

“Are you seriously sorry about what you did?”

“Of course! Please, you forgive me, right? You’re not going to call the GMs, are you?”

“I suppose I’d stand to gain more if I accepted your bribe and overlooked this case.”

“Exactly! You do just that!”

“But I refuse!”

“Wh-Why?! You’re kidding, right? Tell me you were just making a manga reference for fun there or something.”

“Nope, I’m serious. I’ve had enough of this bullshit. I’m making the GM call,” I told her. Abruptly, she did a one-eighty.

“Don’t you dare! All I did was share a little gossip over some business talk!

How is that any different from chatting on online forums?!”

“Having a discussion online and making a joke out of other people’s personal information for your own gain are two totally different things.”

“Are not! Anyway, are you getting a kick out of *threatening* me or something?! You’re pretty messed up!”

“What the?! Look who’s talking!”

“Shut up! You’re just full of yourself because you got a title! Are you that proud of being labeled a noob?! I’m putting that sorry disgrace of yours to good use, you know? If anything, you should be grateful that I’m making you famous!”

“I’ve had it up to here with you.”

“I said *stop*! Don’t you dare, you *bleep bleep* bastard! I didn’t do anything wrong! Why are you treating me like this?!”

Yikes, this was hella scary! Although I was doing my best to maintain my composure so she wouldn’t walk all over me, my brain was screaming for me to run. She was terrifying. Honestly, it was kind of impressive how easily she was able to justify her actions to herself. One glance at the look on her face and I suddenly got the feeling that I knew what demons looked like.

Well, at least it looked like I’d be able to call the GMs now without feeling any guilt. If anything, I hoped Mirei did get banned. It finally seemed to dawn on her that she wouldn’t be able to stop me from making the call, as she abruptly got down on her knees and began apologizing.

“I’m sorry! I’ll do whatever you want, so please don’t do it!”

“...Too late.”

“I’ll do anything, I swear! So please, anything but that!”

“Let’s go, Olto,” I sighed.

“Mm.”

I couldn’t stand to spend another minute with Mirei, so I turned my back on her and started walking away.

“Go to hell, you bastard! I don’t give a rat’s ass—”

Mirei hurled insult after insult at me as I left the square. While walking, I proceeded to open my status window and press the GM call button, but before I could do so, a ringing sound reverberated inside my head.

“Hm? Is this supposed to be a phone ringing? Are the devs, like, calling *me*?”

Much to my amazement, it was in fact the moderators on the line.

I ought to pick this up, right? What was going on?

I decided to answer.

“Hello? LJO GM Center speaking.”

“Uh, hi.”

Since I couldn’t see the other person’s face, it felt like I was talking to them on my cell phone.

“Did you need something from me?” I asked.

“We’ve received a report that a certain player has been inappropriately harassing you. We’re currently investigating the issue to confirm if this statement is true. Is this correct, Mr. Yuto?”

Could they be referring to Mirei? I guess someone else had already reported her to the GMs. I had to make sure they weren’t talking about a different player, though.

“What exactly do you mean by ‘inappropriate’?”

“We’ve been told there’s a player who’s been spreading your personal information with malicious intent. Did you consent to your information being advertised in this manner?”

As I suspected, the player in question *was* Mirei.

“I was just about to call you about that, actually.”

“Were you affected by said player’s actions, then?”

“As a matter of fact, I was...”

Our exchange went smoothly after that. I told them our names and described

the type of harassment I'd received, and then the GM checked the logs. LJO apparently kept a record of everything that happened in-game, and as long as you had concrete details of the event, such as the exact time and the names of the players involved, the GMs could replay the scene on the spot.

"This is terrible. It's just one violation after another," the GM exclaimed, sounding sympathetic.

"I know, right?" I replied.

"We'll deal with it right away. I estimate the matter will be resolved in less than an hour, in-game time. Depending on the severity, we'll most likely be deleting the player's account."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that. There's no telling how she'll retaliate, what with her resenting me and all."

"I'm sorry you had to deal with this. Thank you for your time and patience."

"I appreciate your help."

"Enjoy your otherworldly travels," the GM said before hanging up.

Ooh, nice turn of phrase. That ought to have gotten rid of all the rumor-spreading bastards, right?

Online Forum [Southern Town Square Drama?] A Summary of the Fight that Went Down in the Square

Information wanted on the commotion that occurred in the Southern Town Square.

13: Leroy

There was a huge commotion in the square. What happened? I heard that someone got down on their knees or something.

14: ThunderKing

Yeah. Apparently, a hot girl got down on her hands and knees and apologized to a short dude. Drama much?

15: Leroy

What kinda asshole makes a pretty girl do that?! Doing that to anyone has gotta be against the rules, though! That’s clearly power harassment.

16: ThunderKing

I think it depends on what the reason was. Was it some sort of lover’s spat, maybe?

17: Leroy

You’re saying people are dating in this game *already*?

18: ThunderKing

No, I meant maybe they’re dating in real life and had a fight while gaming. It’s possible.

19: Leroy

Friggin normies! Leave your problems offline, damn it.

They should just break up already. Serves ’em right!

20: Rougarou

You know, I was there when it happened.

I saw a woman and a man arguing; next thing I knew, the man tried to run—or did he just turn his back on her?—and the woman got down on the ground, but the dude ignored her and left.

Here’s the video:

***

I couldn’t catch what they were saying, though, since they were too far away.

21: ThunderKing

I saw the video. I know this guy—I’m pretty sure he’s the Silver-Haired Pioneer.

22: Leroy

Hey, that’s Mirei who’s apologizing!

What a douchebag! So *he’s* that Silver-Haired Pioneer?

23: ThunderKing

I’m sure of it. He matches the description I heard from an acquaintance: a short, silver-haired Tamer with a kid

monster. It has to be him.

24: Raven

I've met the guy. It was shortly before the incident in the square, but he did seem like bad news.

The whole title thing's definitely gotten to his head. He totally ignored me when I begged him to tell me about it.

25: Rock

Mirei's account got deleted.

26: Leroy

Huh? What do you mean, and how do you know?

27: Rock

We were friends with each other, and I contacted her to ask about the details of the incident. But when I did, I got a message saying, *"This player's account has been deleted."*

28: Leroy

Does that mean Mirei left the game after the argument?

29: Raven

So it's the Silver-Haired Pioneer's fault? He probably hurt her feelings and turned her off the game.

30: ThunderKing

It's possible.

31: Leroy

Unforgivable! Who does he think he is?! I'm gonna give

him a piece of my mind!

32: Rock

Me too!

33: Rougarou

I want to know more about his title. I’m sure he’ll talk if we all go after him.

34: Raven

Good idea. Let’s go teach that cocky bastard a lesson!

***

After asking the GMs to handle the case with Mirei, Olto and I were about to head to the Farming Guild to find out if there were any quests I could fulfill, when I suddenly heard people shouting angrily at me.

“There he is! It’s him!”

“Hey, you there! You’re the Silver-Haired Pioneer, aren’t ya?!”

At first, I thought those two idiots who’d pestered me on my way to the square had returned, but these men were wildly different in appearance. While the dudes I’d run into had been human, these guys were both anthros. One of them appeared to be half-cat, half-human, and the other half-dog.

I had a bad feeling about this. They had clearly heard about me from Mirei and come to pick a fight.

“Let’s get outta here, Olto,” I whispered, turning my back on the hybrids.

“Mm!”

“Hey! Get your ass back here, ya respawning bastard!”

“You piece of scum!”

Hang on. I could understand if they’d called me a noob, but why scum?!

As I ran, even more people yelled after me.

“Hey, that’s the guy who forced Mirei to grovel in front of him!”

“Found him!”

“Apologize to Mirei, ya douchebag!”

Don’t tell me these guys were all friends with Mirei?! Or were they simply idiots who were all in love with her? *Come on, everyone is hot in this game!* How could they be deceived so easily? She had a horrible personality. Not that I was in any position to criticize others, though, seeing as I had nearly fallen for her charm myself.

“I-It’s her fault for spreading my personal info.”

“Huh? So you’re sayin’ it was okay to make her do *that*?!”

“Actually, she did that hersel—”

“In the first place, why’d ya gotta get so mad at her for just talkin’ about you? Get off your high horse!”

“But...”

“You think you’re better than everyone, is that it? Just because you got a unique title!”

It was no use. They obviously had no intention of hearing me out. Well, I should’ve known. There was no way I could have a rational conversation with morons like these.

“...See ya!”

“Hey!”

“He’s getting away!”

The men pursued me as I took off running. As I ran, more and more people started chasing me. At first, I thought it was just my imagination, but the number of angry shouts was clearly increasing.

“He went that way!”

“Over there!”

“Tell us about your title!”

Other players were beginning to join in on the mob.

Wait, my title...? Could they actually be *jealous* of me?

“As if.”

It’d be understandable if I had a boastworthy title like the other two guys, but a scarlet letter of an achievement like mine? *No way.* They probably just wanted another reason to laugh at me.

“That’s him!”

“So *he’s* the Silver-Haired Pioneer!”

“Interesting.”

Yikes! They were catching up to me!

I was running out of places to escape to, though. There seemed to be someone awaiting me at every corner. *Damn it!* Though, come to think of it, why did *I* have to run? I hadn't done anything wrong! If anything, didn't their yelling and chasing me around constitute harassment? This was definitely one for the GMs. I could report this to them, right?

Oh, but wait... Although someone else had called them on my behalf earlier, it probably wouldn't look good for them to receive another report about me so soon. I didn't want them thinking I was some sort of troublemaker...

"Wait up, dipshit!"

"Yo, Silver-Hair!"

There had to be somewhere I could hide. *Think!*

"Come on, come on... Hey! Isn't this near that place?" I recalled.

I ducked into the alley beside me and immediately rushed into one of the buildings.

"Hi again!" I greeted the innkeeper breathlessly.

"Why, hello, otherworldly traveler. Welcome," the woman replied. It was the inn where I had done the dishwashing gig last night.

This location wasn't visible from the outside, and I doubted anyone had seen me entering. Short of my pursuers combing the whole area, I'd be able to bide my time here for a while.

"So, what brings you here today?"

"There are some folks after me..."

What the hell was I saying? The innkeeper was an NPC. No matter how advanced her AI system was, there was no way she was going to harbor a fugitive when there wasn't even an event going on. I was so lost in my own worries it took a split second for the innkeeper's next words to sink in.

"In that case, why don't you stay for a bit? Make yourself at home."

"Huh?"

"I'd actually like you to do me a favor. I'm sending you a request now."

“*You have received an urgent request from an NPC.*”

I quickly checked my inbox to discover that I’d received another dishwashing quest. The reward was exactly the same as yesterday: one medicinal herb.

“Wow, you can receive quests without visiting a guild?”

“I’m only asking you because I know I can trust you.”

I had no idea what I’d done to earn her trust, but this was a godsend. Doing dishes was definitely a good way to kill some time.

“I’ll do it!”

“Thanks, dear. Off to the back with you.”

That’s right. The sink was located in a keep-out zone, which was normally off-limits to players. Areas such as NPCs’ living quarters that, if entered without permission, could be considered trespassing in real life, were designated as keep-out zones. These areas were sealed off by an invisible wall that blocked you from entering them, unlike in a certain famous JRPG, which allowed the hero to indiscriminately break into houses and rummage through closets and vases. In LJO, however, you were only allowed in such places if you were undertaking a quest, like Olto and I currently were.

“Mm!”

“Wanna help me with the dishes, buddy?”

“Mmm!”

Doing the dishes didn’t require any special skills, and besides, Olto was a humanoid monster. I was pretty sure he was more than capable.

“Here you go, little one,” the innkeeper said, bringing Olto a stool to help him reach the sink.

“All right, let’s get to work!”

“Mm-mm!”

The two of us busily scrubbed away at the dishes the innkeeper brought to us.

“Mm-mm.”

Although I could tell that Olto was serious, he looked like a kid at play, with all the bubbles surrounding him.

“You’re getting all soapy, Olto.”

“Mm?”

I’d been wiping away the suds on him every now and then, but during the few seconds I’d taken my eyes off him, Olto had disappeared behind a sea of bubbles. His entire body, except for his face, was covered in them.

“Don’t get too carried away.”

“Mmm...”

Oh well, getting a little messy was kind of inevitable. I guessed we could clean up once we were done.

Olto and I continued to wash the dishes in earnest. The task, while tedious, wasn’t too bad with Olto humming happily by my side. Just then, an alarm went off.

Beep beep beep!

“Gah! What’s that noise?! Turn it *off*!” I yelled, abandoning the washing-up altogether.

I covered my ears with my hands, but the sound still rang loud and clear. Olto gazed at me, puzzled. Apparently, he hadn’t heard the alarm.

“*This is an important announcement from the management team. Please read our message as soon as possible. Once you open this message, you will be isolated from the game temporarily. Would you like to proceed?*”

Management team? Important notice? I hadn’t a clue what this was about, but I figured I might as well read it.

Right after clicking on the message, I found myself standing in an unfamiliar white room instead of the kitchen. Thankfully, it wasn’t the type of sterile, all-white room that tended to be depicted in characters’ inner psychological worlds in fantasy novels, the kind which would drive you crazy after a few hours. The floor was covered with beige-white tiles, and the walls and ceiling were a milky cream color. There was a smallish table and two chairs in the center of the

room, which were also white, but the different types of houseplants placed in the four corners of the room prevented it from feeling overly dull. I still didn't want to stay here for too long, though.

As I was staring around the room in confusion, a stranger appeared before me. Their avatar was dressed in a black suit and tie—hardly something you'd expect from a fantasy setting. They gave off the impression of a business person, one who was extremely good at their job.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Yuto," the avatar greeted me.

"H-Hi. Nice to meet you too, I guess?"

"My apologies. I am from the LJO management team."

"Huh? Management team?" I echoed. I hadn't been expecting to meet one of the higher-ups.

"Um, where are we?"

"This field is known as the Reception Room, which we use when we meet players in person. You'll return to the game in the exact same state you were in when you arrived here, so please don't worry."

"Uh-huh..."

"This is a special room: the time spent here will not affect your time spent in the game. Please, have a seat."

"O-Okay."

The administrator waited until I was seated before sitting down across from me. They then proceeded to explain the situation.

"First of all, I'd like to make it clear that you have in no way violated the rules, nor has another player made a GM call. I'm not here to punish you, so you can relax."

Phew, thank goodness for that. I was worried that I'd perhaps unknowingly done something wrong and been brought here as a warning.

"We have several reasons for summoning you here, the first one being in regards to your report to the GMs. The player known as Mirei will be having

their account deleted. As stated in the terms of use, they will be unable to create a new account for two months. In addition, when they log in to the game again, they will be added to the blacklist and monitored carefully."

It looked like I wouldn't have to worry about running into Mirei for a while. Besides, this would probably teach her not to do something so stupid again. All things considered, this was a huge setback for her, so she might not even play the game anymore.

"Thank you very much."

"Not at all; this is what we do. Next, we'd like to discuss the players who were chasing you. The GM Center also received reports of multiple players forming an angry mob to pursue a single player."

"Right..."

"We tracked down the player in question and found out that the person being chased was none other than you, Mr. Yuto. We came to the conclusion that these were not isolated incidents, which is why I'm here to give you a rundown."

I then received a lengthy report, which could be summed up as follows:

The idiots who had pursued me and the players who had made slanderous assumptions in the in-game forums had been identified and punished. The most vicious players' accounts had been deleted, while the players with lighter offenses had their accounts suspended for one real world week. The management team was additionally preparing to make an announcement both server-wide and through in-game mail regarding the incident. Their intention was to notify the public that players who broke the rules would be punished accordingly.

While I couldn't care less about some boring announcement, I couldn't very well ignore it either, given that this case concerned me. The management team, who were basically gods in this game, were humbly asking me for permission, and I didn't have the heart to turn them down.

"Er, either way is fine with me. I'll leave it up to you guys."

"Very well. That'll be all from us. Thank you for your time. Do you have any

questions?”

Hmm, that was a hard one. I couldn’t think of anything off the top of my head.

“If you have any questions regarding this matter, please feel free to send us a message.”

“Sure thing.”

“Also, this is for you. It isn’t much, but we prepared a small reward in exchange for your cooperation.”

“Huh? *Three thousand G?* Are you sure?”

That wasn’t the only reward from the management team. Seriously? Did they really mean it?

I pressed the ‘Accept’ button, and several new items were added to my inventory. The bundle included medicinal herbs, life sunflowers, water pumice, red panther caps, energy drinks, and a weird type of incense.

Name: Incense, Red (Town of Beginnings)

Rarity: 3 / Quality: 5★

Effect: Attracts unique monsters. Effective for 25 minutes.

Incense was a single-use item that could be used to lure out monsters within the vicinity. The effects of incense varied depending on their color; red attracted unique monsters. If the item specified a town, it could only be used in the town’s neighboring areas.

“Interesting.”

“I believe it will benefit you greatly since you’re a Tamer.”

It certainly looked like it would come in handy, although it was kind of useless to me at the moment. I could see using it eventually, though.

“And a plant booster, huh?”

Name: Plant Booster, Red

Rarity: 3 / Quality: 4★

Effect: Sprinkle on farmland to increase the rank of crops by one. Effective for one day.

Another amazing item. Could I really have it for free?

“We retrieved this item from Mirei’s possessions since it should prove useful to you.”

“I can have this? You sure?”

“Please do. It’ll just be deleted otherwise. I’ll return you to the game now.”

“Oh, okay.”

Immediately after, I experienced a floating sensation, like I was on an elevator, and found myself transported back to the kitchen in the inn.

“Mm?”

Olto looked up at me suspiciously. Since time wasn’t supposed to have passed in-game, it probably seemed like I’d just paused in the middle of washing dishes.

“Mm!”

“Hey, take it easy. I’m not trying to slack off or anything.”

“Mm?”

All right, back to the task. If what the administrator had said was true, the guys who had chased me should’ve been eliminated by now. Still, I wasn’t going to give up on my quest halfway.

An hour later, we finished.

“We’re done.”

“Mmm.”

I received no word from the management team after that, and the two of us completed our quest without a hitch.

After receiving our reward from the innkeeper, we observed the situation outside.

“Let’s see if things have died down a bit...”

“Mm-mm...”

I poked my head out of the door to check if there was anyone nearby. The town was still once more, as if the commotion just an hour prior had never happened. It looked like we were in the clear.

“All right, shall we head back to our farm?”

“Mm!”

Online Forum [Southern Town Square Drama?] A Summary of the Fight that Went Down in the Square

Information wanted on the commotion that occurred in the Southern Town Square.

221: Yodel-Ay-Hee

Saw the official announcement. Everyone’s been talking about it.

222: visitorfromanotherplanet

I saw it too. Those players definitely had it coming, though. I’m sure some people think otherwise, but I support the devs’ decision.

223: Yang Yang

Me too. Gotta hand it to the devs. They did a great job.

224: visitorfromanotherplanet

Yeah I mean, they suspended, like, forty players all at once. Talk about making an example lol

---

225: Yodel-Ay-Hee

Seems like most of them got heated over the fake rumors in the forums. A bunch of idiots got the wrong idea about Silver-Haired after watching that whole thing with the woman who got her account deleted getting down on her knees.

226: Yang Yang

I’m pretty sure some of them were just jealous of him for that title too.

227: visitorfromanotherplanet

Don’t forget those idiots that fell for Mirei’s act.

I’m guessing they totally believed her when she said, “I didn’t do anything wrong! I was deceived!”

What a load of crap.

228: Yodel-Ay-Hee

Did you read the conversation log between her and Silver-Haired that the devs made public? It was hilarious. I’m amazed anyone could believe her.

Women are scary as hell!

229: visitorfromanotherplanet

I know, right?! I saw the log too, and for real, the *chills* I got when that chick did a one-eighty on him...

230: Yang Yang

Silver-Haired talking to himself cracked me up.

“Earth to Yuto. Stop thinking with the wrong head. This is just an avatar—it’s nothing but a heavily Photoshopped illusion!”

True dat XD

231: visitorfromanotherplanet

Guy has one helluva will. He succumbed to neither temptation nor bribery

---

232: Yodel-Ay-Hee

Actually, it looked like he was wavering quite a bit lol

Still, he didn’t give in. I admire that part of him.

233: Yang Yang

That “But I refuse!” was the cherry on top.

I love how he threw in a JoJo reference.

234: Yodel-Ay-Hee

All hell broke loose once Mirei revealed her true colors.

235: visitorfromanotherplanet

Apparently, there were quite a few people who tried to defend her until the end, all, “Mirei would never do anything like that!” or, “Mirei’s a sweet girl!”

Shut them right up once they saw the log, though.

Idiots.

236: Yodel-Ay-Hee

There’s no way that someone who basically doxxes people like that could be a “nice person” anyway. I don’t get how they convinced themselves otherwise.

237: Yang Yang

I bet most of them are miserable bastards who can’t even talk to a woman in real life. They’re such virgins they’d fall for anything.

238: visitorfromanotherplanet

Stop! You really gonna rub salt in our wounds like that?!

239: Yodel-Ay-Hee

Pot, meet kettle.

240: Yang Yang

Huh?

241: visitorfromanotherplanet

Wait, don’t tell me...

242: Yodel-Ay-Hee

Wait dude, do you actually talk to women then...?

243: Yang Yang

Yeah...? Do you *not* talk to women? Do you like, live in the middle of nowhere or something?

244: visitorfromanotherplanet

NOoooooooooooooooooooooooo!

245: Yodel-Ay-Hee

Traitor.

246: visitorfromanotherplanet

Yeah, how could you?!

247: Yang Yang

Wait, you guys weren’t joking? You seriously don’t have girlfriends?

248: visitorfromanotherplanet

Girlfriend?!

I thought you were just talking up the “conversations” you had with the women at your job!

I’ve never been more upset about this game not having PvP.

249: Yodel-Ay-Hee

Better watch your back when you go out at night, f-ing normie.

250: Yang Yang

Seriously? Come on, what’s the big deal?

251: visitorfromanotherplanet

SHUT UP!

252: Yodel-Ay-Hee

What’s a normie doing playing games, huh?! Why don’t you go make out with your girlfriend or something?!

***

After all the commotion died down, Olto and I returned to our farm.

“I really need a break...” I sighed.

I showed Olto the red panther cap that I’d just obtained.

“Mm?” He looked at me curiously.

If we could grow this mushroom along with our poison hemlock and paralyzing plants, I’d be able to concoct something known as a Hunter Potion, a useful item that could both paralyze and poison my opponents. I heard it fetched a pretty good price on the market as well.

“Can you grow this, Olto?” I asked.

“Mmm...”

“Is that a no?”

“Mm-mm!”

“So you *can* grow it?”

“Mm-mm.”

Which was it? He kept flipping between shaking his head and nodding. If I had to guess, that meant there was some way to cultivate this crop—just not at the moment.

“What’s lacking? Your skills?”

“Mm-mm!” Olto stomped about, pouting indignantly. So it wasn’t a lack of ability.

“Hey, I’m sorry. Don’t get mad.”

“Mm-mm-mm.”

“Hmm, what are we missing then? Tools?”

Olto nodded in reply. Bingo. It appeared we needed some type of tool, but what kind? As if to answer my question, Olto busted out one of his moves again, miming. He looked like he was hugging something, then moving up and

down...?

“You’re a...koala clinging to a tree?” I offered.

“Mmm...”

“Come on, don’t look at me like that.”

“Mmm.”

“Did you just sigh?”

“Mm?”

“Hey, no cocking your head! You adorable little rascal.”

“Mm-mm.”

“And quit blushing! Jeez. What *are* we missing, though?”

I knew he was trying to mimic some sort of shape with his hands, but... If it was something we needed to grow mushrooms, then it was most likely...

“Are you talking about a mushroom log?”

“Mm!” Olto nodded.

Bingo. Where could we possibly get our hands on a mushroom log, though? *Do we go to a forest and cut down a tree?*

“Guess we should ask at the Farming Guild.”

When in doubt, to the Guild. Since I needed to buy a new plot of land anyway, I figured I might as well ask them.

“Mmm!”

The two of us set out for the guild, Olto swinging his arms and skipping along the way. Although I’d been feeling sort of dejected after everything that had happened, one look at Olto was enough to soothe my frazzled nerves. He truly was a healing presence. Ten minutes later, we arrived at the Farming Guild.

“Guess I’ll ask about the mushroom logs before we buy more land,” I decided, approaching the desk.

“Sure, we *do* sell them here, but...ya can’t buy one yet, sonny,” the old man at the reception replied in response to my query.

“Why’s that?” I asked.

“Yer rank isn’t high enough. Players who belong to a guild are assigned a rank depending on how often they contribute to the guild. You can raise your guild rank by completing more quests. Unfortunately, you’re still at rank 1. Your rank needs to be 2 or higher to buy mushroom logs.”

I opened my status window to check the section titled Guilds. I belonged to three guilds at the moment—the Adventurers’ Guild, the Magical Beasts Guild, and the Farming Guild—which were all currently at rank 1.

I asked the old fellow how to raise my rank. He kindly obliged by explaining that item delivery and gathering quests granted fewer rewards but higher contribution points, while special quests had better rewards but fewer contribution points. Hunting quests were high-return both in terms of reward and contribution points. Normally, you’d probably go about raising your rank by completing hunting quests, but...

“Yeah, right. No way I’m hunting any monsters.”

That left me with gathering and item delivery quests, which weren’t exactly a walk in the park either. Leaving town was pretty much a suicide mission.

“I guess my only choice is to grow and deliver crops.”

“Good idea. Why don’tcha buy some seeds and grow them? Unfortunately, I can’t sell ya any more since your rank isn’t high enough, but there are shops in town that do.”

Hmm, if my memory served me correctly, I *might* be able to buy seeds at the general store, which I could then grow and deliver to the guild. Either way, it looked like I wouldn’t be able to get my hands on a mushroom log right now.

“In that case, guess I’ll buy a farm first.”

If the growing didn’t pan out, I might end up going to the forest to gather items as a last resort, in which case I would still need medicine and potions. So, there was no harm in making more either way. The farm-buying process was more straightforward the second time around, and I was able to obtain a spot right next to our current piece of land.

The only crops I had to plant at the moment were the medicinal herbs and life sunflowers I had just obtained, plus the one remaining edible grass seed from before. That was hardly enough; I still had fifteen empty planting spots left. Seeing as my crops would be ready for harvest tomorrow, I could sow my new seeds right away after that. However, it felt like a waste of space to let the farm sit idle for even that long.

"All right, let's go buy some vegetable seeds."

If all went well, the seeds might grow fairly quickly, which would allow me to complete some item delivery quests and increase my contribution to the guild.

Oops, almost forgot to ask the most important question.

"How much do mushroom logs cost, by the way?"

"Forty-five hundred apiece."

That was more expensive than I imagined. Clearly not an item for lower-ranking players like me.

I currently had 8,350 G in my pocket. While it would be enough to buy one log, I wanted to make more money first.

"Hmm. How else can I make money aside from completing special quests...?"

As I studied the list of quests on the Farming Guild's notice board, one of them caught my eye.

"Resurvey the map...?"

```
Labor Quest

Requirement: Walk around the Town of Beginnings and
update the current map.

Reward: 600 G

Time Limit: Three days
```

"What kinda quest is this?"

Prompted by my curiosity, I asked the old man to explain it in more detail.

Basically, the job entailed creating a map by exploring every nook and cranny of the North, East, South, West, and Central Squares in the Town of Beginnings. The purpose of the task was to add new farmlands, stalls, and player-run shops to the map and confirm that there were no errors.

While the job would be rather time-consuming, it wasn't a bad deal. Two hundred per day was probably way too cheap for most people, but for someone who was unable to fight, this quest was practically a godsend. You could say that we were a match made in heaven.

"Not many people have been interested in this one. In fact, you're the first person here to show any interest in it."

I bet. If I were a regular player, I wouldn't want to get stuck doing a three-day quest this early either.

"Well, there are loads of places I haven't visited yet in the Town of Beginnings. I'll think of it as a sightseeing tour."

"Glad to hear that. I'm counting on ya."

After leaving the guild, I opened up the blank map that the old fellow had given me. Only the outline of the town and some streets were drawn on it—nothing out of the ordinary. With the map still in hand, I started walking.

"Nice, looks like it automatically maps my movements."

My tracks had been filled in with a light wash of color. This way, I could immediately tell which areas I hadn't explored yet.

"Let's go buy some seeds. We can fill in the map while we're at it."

"Mm."

The first place I headed to was the general store where I had sold my armor, which indeed stocked several types of seeds.

"Spinach, blue carrots, and amber pumpkins, eh?"

"That'll be 100 G, 200 G, and 250 G, respectively," the owner informed me.

"Hmm..."

Wait a minute, who said I had to buy *seeds*? Couldn't I just purchase

vegetables and propagate them? The general store sold vegetables as well; spinach, for instance, only cost 50 G per bundle.

According to the old lady, however, that wasn't an option.

"You can propagate vegetables purchased from guilds or other adventurers, but not the ones from our store."

Apparently, sourcing from NPC shops would be out of the question.

"Guess I've no choice but to buy seeds, huh?"

I decided to purchase the cheapest packet—spinach—which cost 100 G for five seeds. All I had to do now was give them to Olto to grow.

"Let's see, I already have fertilizer..."

I wanted to buy mulch as well, but unfortunately, it wasn't available here. Did I have to obtain it myself? Well, that wouldn't be happening. I had stumbled upon it purely by chance deep inside the forest; I'd really hoped I could just buy it somewhere.

"Might as well swing by Alyssa's place before I head back."

I might have luck finding mulch at a player-run store. I could also browse the other stalls in the square while I was at it.

"The map's really lighting up."

I checked the map I'd been given for my quest, and sure enough, the areas I'd traveled through had been filled in. The path from the Farming Guild to the general store and up to the small square in the south had been colored blue. However, that was only a tiny portion of the map. It looked like it would take quite a while to fill in the whole thing. Was there any way for me to cover ground faster...? Just then, an idea came to me.

"Olto, can you try walking that way?"

"Mm?"

"Yep, that little path over there. Ten steps should do it."

"Mm! Mm-mm-mm-mm-mm..."

Olto mumbled as though he were counting his steps, taking slow, wide strides

in the direction I pointed. The map, however, showed no changes. It looked like I would have to do all of the walking myself.

“That’s enough, Olto. Come on back.”

“Mm-mm.”

Olto toddled back to my side, and I patted him on the head. We then headed to Alyssa’s stall.

“Hi,” I greeted Alyssa.

“Welcome. Thank you for your continued patronage!” she replied cheerfully.

“I don’t visit your shop *that* regularly.”

“Oh, please. I’d say visiting my shop several times in one day definitely makes you a regular.”

Now that she mentioned it, it *was* my third time visiting today.

“Looks like you had it pretty rough.”

“Tell me about it... Oh, by the way, are you the one who called the GMs?”

“Nope, wasn’t me. Just goes to show that not *everyone’s* out to get you, right?”

“I see. I would’ve loved to thank whoever it was, then. They didn’t tell me who did it.”

“Huh? Are you telling me that someone on the management team came to see you personally?”

“More like I was summoned by them.”

I told Alyssa about our exchange, and she nodded as though impressed.

“Impressive. They sure are quick.”

“They were really polite and thorough too. I wouldn’t have minded if they’d just sent me an email or something.”

“That gossip really made quite the rounds, didn’t it? Given that Mirei was showing off that screenshot, I bet there’s more than enough people who know your face now. That’s probably why management was so diligent about your

case.”

“Oh well, guess there’s no point dwelling on it. Once people realize that the player harassing me got her account deleted, they’ll probably ease up a bit in person, so I’ll wait for the rumors to subside. The management team avatar did mention making a public announcement about the players who got suspended because of this.”

“It’s already out there—the names of the players, plus the punishments they received. They also uploaded the conversation log between you and Mirei, I think.”

“Huh? What conversation log?”

Alyssa showed me the log in question, which, sure enough, was of the exchange between Mirei and me, although the higher-ups had been careful to obscure my name. I hadn’t said anything weird, had I?

“Well, I’m sure no one will side with Mirei after watching this, so I’d say things worked out in your favor. I’ll let other players know that those idiots got their accounts deleted. That way, there’ll be less trouble for you, right?”

“You’ll do that for me?”

“Yeah. After all, I didn’t get to make a GM call in time. As someone who sells information on titles, this incident concerns me as well.”

By the time Alyssa had heard the rumor about a player spreading my personal information and verified the details, someone had already called the GMs. So she *did* try to report Mirei on my behalf. I felt a pang of guilt at my earlier accusation.

“Here, this is for you,” Alyssa said, handing me a mug filled with a bluish-green liquid.

“Huh? Honey carrot juice? Are you sure? But why?”

“Cheer up, kid.”

“...Thanks.” I gratefully accepted the drink and took a sip.

Whoa, this was *good*! It tasted like a fresh fruit punch. As I was busily gulping down the juice, I noticed Olto staring up at me with obvious envy in his eyes. *D-*

Don't look at me like that, buddy. There's not enough to go around. I eyed him somewhat apologetically.

Noticing Olto's begrudging look, Alyssa handed me another mug of juice.

"And one for your little munchkin."

"No, please, you really don't have to do that. Besides, I've already fed him today."

"In that case, consider this payment for telling me about your conversation with the devs. He can drink it tomorrow."

While I didn't feel like that trifling piece of information was worth such a delicious food item, I was sure Olto would be unhappy if I turned down Alyssa's offer. I graciously accepted her gift.

"So, you here to buy more info?"

"Shopping, actually. Do you sell plants I can grow, or mulch?"

"Sorry, I don't. I just sold the last of my stock, and I didn't have a lot of ingredients to begin with. Some crafter-type player bought me out."

"Gotcha..."

"Mm..."

I couldn't help but crack a smile as Olto mimicked my movements, drooping his head in disappointment. He never failed to lift my spirits; there was not a dull moment with this little guy.

"Let's see... If you want that sort of stuff, you should visit Maple's Tool Shop in the plaza in front of the Southern Gate. She's an ex-Farmer turned Merchant, so she stocks those kinds of items."

"Huh. Interesting."

Sounded like I might be able to get mulch there.

"It's a nice place all right. I'd go if I were you."

"I'm guessing this Maple is another clan member of yours?"

"That obvious?"

“Yeah, seeing as you didn’t charge me for the info.”

“Well, she does sell a wide variety of items!”

“Hey, I didn’t say I wouldn’t go.”

“Say hi to her for me!”

Thanks to the map, I easily found my way to the plaza in front of the Southern Gate. There were three NPC shops plus one player stall in the square.

Due to this area being an agricultural district, the player-run store didn’t seem to be very popular. *That must be Maple’s Tool Shop*, I thought.

“Excuse me.”

“Hi there. Welcome.”

The woman sitting behind the counter had long, red hair and was fairly tall—at least 170 centimeters by my estimation. Her figure was nothing to scoff at either, her curves accentuated by the cut of her outfit.

“Are you Maple?”

“I am indeed. And you are...?”

“Yuto. Alyssa recommended your place to me.”

“Ooh, did she? I’ll make sure to give you a *very* thorough walk-through then.”

Maple had a distinct way of speaking, somehow elongating her vowels without it sounding like she was talking too slowly. She gave off a mature and kindly air.

“Do you sell mulch?”

“Why *yeees*, I do. Are you a Farmer by any chance? Would be a nice change; aren’t too many Farmer-types yet.”

“Uh, no. I just happened to buy a farm.”

“Is that so? How interesting. If your job class isn’t related to farming, though, you’ve got a hard road ahead of you. Are you sure you can manage?” Maple asked worriedly, resting her cheek on her hand.

I guessed that *was* a valid concern, considering how you normally needed

skills for plowing and stuff. No need to worry, though—I had Olto.

“Well, I get by.”

“I see. Hmm, I’m guessing Alyssa knows something about this?”

“Probably.”

“All right, I’ll ask her later then.”

“So, about that mulch...”

“Ah, yes. I have some, although the quality isn’t very good.”

“This is good enough, right, Olto?”

“Mm!”

“Oh my.”

Maple suddenly seemed aware of Olto’s presence. She leaned over the counter to take a closer look at him.

“Is that your tamed monster? Isn’t he a cutie?” she cooed.

She waved at Olto, who waved back. Maple gasped and squealed in delight. *Yep, my boy sure knows how to steal hearts.*

“I get it now. Yes, you should be fine if you have him.”

“Oh, so you know about his type?”

“It has to do with farming, after all. Oh yes, the mulch. It’s 250 G apiece.”

“That’s a lot more expensive than fertilizer.”

“Well, it *is* far more potent than your basic fertilizer.”

“It is?”

“According to our experiments during the beta phase, premium fertilizer was the most effective. Next was mulch, then lastly, regular fertilizer.”

There was some overlap between the effects of fertilizer and mulch too. The higher price point made sense.

“Also, do you have any crops I can propagate?”

“Oh, plenty. I have herbs and plants from around here, vegetables...”

“Not vegetables, ideally.”

Maple showed me a bunch of herbs I was already familiar with: medicinal herbs, poison hemlock, paralyzing plants, and life sunflowers.

“...Dried medicinal herbs?”

“Mm-hm. Dried them myself.”

Come to think of it, one of the NPC shops was selling dried red panther caps. Did drying them change their effect?

Name: Dried Medicinal Herb

Rarity: 1 / Quality: 3★

Effect: Recovers 7 HP. (10-minute cooldown) Slight boost in potency. Can’t be propagated.

Getting a slight boost during concocting was undoubtedly a plus. Too bad it couldn’t be propagated, though. *I’ll skip it for now*, I decided. I could also try drying plants myself. I was sure I could manage that by hanging them to dry in the shade for a few days, although whether I would be successful was an entirely different matter. This shop belonged to one of the Quick-Eared Cats, though. I didn’t want to ask too many questions, lest I end up being badgered into buying information. I feigned indifference and returned the dried medicinal herb to its original place.

“I want to propagate my crops, so I’m not really looking for dried stuff...”

“Ah, right. How about this then?”

“Hemorrhaging grass? Never seen that one.”

Name: Hemorrhaging Grass

Rarity: 1 / Quality: 1★

Effect: Slight chance of Bleeding when ingested.

Bleeding referred to a type of status ailment. Since LJO was intended for players ages twelve and up, there was a possibility that children would be playing. Therefore, neither players nor enemies suffered any actual blood loss when they took damage. When afflicted with a Bleeding status ailment, however, you ended up with speckles of fake blood on your body, and you received slightly more damage.

"You can find a few occasionally in the Northern Plains. Once you get to Zone Two, you can probably find them anywhere."

"How much is this?"

"That'll be 100 G."

That was slightly more expensive than poison hemlock. I supposed it was a reasonable price, though, given that it was a rare find in Zone One. If this item functioned in the same way as poison hemlock and paralyzing plants, then there was a good chance that I'd be able to create Hemorrhaging Potions with three of them.

"You can grow this, right, Olto?" I asked.

"Mm!" Olto responded with a hearty thumbs-up. *No problem!*

"Okay, I'll take some mulch, three clumps of hemorrhaging grass, and one poison hemlock and paralyzing plant each."

I would use these plants to create seeds to sow on our newly purchased farm.

"That'll be 530 G, please."

I had to leave some money for the mushroom log, so I figured that was enough for now.

"Buh-bye, Yuto and Olto! Come again soon!"

"We will."

"Mm-mm!"

Maple waved after us, and we left the plaza in front of the Southern Gate. I was sure we'd be visiting her store again in the future.

Once we returned to our farm, I immediately handed Olto the herbs I'd

bought.

“Time to work your magic, buddy.”

“Mm-mm, mm-mm.”

Was that some kind of song? Olto hummed a cheery little tune as he propagated the plants, then plowed the field and sowed the seeds he’d just created.



Thanks to Olto’s hard work, all the slots on our second farm were now filled.

“Ah, that reminds me. I should use the plant booster,” I said, handing Olto the small vial filled with liquid.

“Mmm.”

He planted the item in the middle of the patch, and for a moment the field glowed green. The plant booster definitely looked like it was working.

“All right. Can’t wait for tomorrow’s harvest.”

I headed to the well to fetch water for the crops, scarcely able to contain my excitement.

Chapter Four: Living the Dull Life

“Morning, Olto,” I greeted him upon returning the next day.

“Mm,” he replied.

After logging in, I raced to the fields, where I was greeted by the sight of our two farms teeming with lush crops.

“Whoa! Olto, you’re a genius!”

“Mmm!”

“This is exciting stuff, man.”

Okay, so it wasn’t like I grew all of these, but I *did* help water them. Besides, this was *my* farm taken care of by *my* tamed monster, which basically meant I did half of the work, right?

“All right, time to harvest!”

“Mm!”

Olto and I set to work pulling out the herbs we’d grown. Apparently, even the simple act of harvesting gained you XP for your Gathering and Farming—halfway through our harvest, I had already raised both skill levels by one.

Today’s yield also included several five-star crops, thanks to the plant booster. *So far, so good*. I let Olto keep the bulk of our harvest so that he could propagate each plant.

“I’ll use the rest to concoct some items.”

The first thing I chose to make was spinach-infused food rations. Since I’d gone to the trouble of cultivating the spinach, I figured I’d do a taste test before shipping them out. I could consider growing some more spinach if they tasted good.

I opened my recipe folder, and a list of gray *????*s appeared before me. These were recipes I hadn’t unlocked yet and thus couldn’t be selected. Once I had all

the ingredients for a particular item, the recipe would change from gray to white and become selectable, although I had to make it at least once to find out what it was called.

I selected the sole white *????* from the list and started cooking in Auto Mode. This food item required one each of the following ingredients: spinach, edible grass, and water.

I followed the instructions and chopped the edible grass and spinach on the chopping board that came with my simple cooking kit. After that, all I had to do was simmer them in water. It couldn't get any easier than that. If this were anything like cooking in real life, I would end up with a bunch of boiled greens. However, given that this was a game...

Once again, I heard a familiar *Poof!* and that goopy mush transformed into four bars of food rations, defying all laws of physics. The normally brown, hard, and bland energy bars were now a deep spinachy-green.

"Hmm. That doesn't look appetizing at all."

They might've made a different impression had they been a lighter spring green or the color of matcha, but alas, they were a dark, earthy green color, which clearly screamed bitter and revolting. I'd probably be sick of them after one bite.

At least, despite this recipe yielding one bar less than usual, the resulting product was more effective than regular food rations.

```
Name: Food Ration (Spinach Flavor)
Rarity: 1 / Quality: 4★
Effect: Recovers hunger status by 37 percent.
```

These bars were far more filling, and as I'd anticipated, their quality was also much higher. Until now, I had to eat five of those disgusting food rations a day to fill me up; now, I only needed three of them.

"Let's try one, shall we?"

I steeled myself and took a bite out of the green food ration.

“Ngh...! Bleurgh!” I spluttered.

I couldn’t believe how awful it tasted. The harsh, bitter taste that spread in my mouth could scarcely be called food. I almost spat it out, but managed to swallow it with some effort.

“Tastes *way* worse than before...!”

I’d rather eat dirt. It was easily the most unappetizing thing that had ever crossed my tongue. Never was I going to cook this item again.

“Mm?”

Olto looked up at me curiously with that cute little head tilt of his.

Why not just give the rest to him? flashed an evil thought through my mind. Honestly, he might eat anything I asked him to, no matter how bad it tasted...

“Mmm.”

D-Damn it, what’s with those innocent eyes?! He clearly expected a tasty treat from me. *St-Stop, don’t look at me like that.*

“Mm?”

Gah, forget it! No way I could give him something so disgusting.

“Th-That reminds me, Alyssa gave me some extra honey carrot juice.”

Olto visibly perked up at those words. He clearly had a sweet tooth.

What should I do? I couldn’t *not* give him the juice now.

The foul aftertaste still lingered in my mouth, though. *Crap.* The more I stared at it, the more appealing the drink looked.

“Mm!”

Olto tugged at my robe, and I came to my senses with a jolt. *R-Right, Alyssa told me this juice was for my monster.*

While I would have given anything for that sweet beverage, I could just eat something tasty once I logged out of the game. This was Olto’s treat. I had to give it to him before I gave in to the temptation.

“Here you go, Olto,” I said, handing him the juice.

“Mm? Mm!”

“Happy?”

“Mm-mm-mm!”

Olto pranced about happily, then bowed as he took the juice from my hands, as though he were receiving some kind of award. Placing one hand on his hip, he proceeded to down the drink in one gulp, like an old geezer drinking a refreshing fruity drink after a bath. Man, that looked like it would’ve hit the spot. Olto, who usually wore little expression, was now beaming from ear to ear.

“Glad you liked it.”

“Mm-mm-mmm!”

“Whoa, you ready to work already?”

“Mm-mm-mm-mm-mm!”

“Hey, s-slow down!”

Olto started working at a furious pace, his hands and feet a blur of movement. It was as if I were watching him on fast-forward.

“Totally different from when I gave him honey dumplings.”

Did his work ethic change depending on what type of food he was given? Talk about a crafty little rascal. It was good to know, though. Maybe I need to try experimenting by feeding him different types of food from now on. I wondered how he would react to less tasty food items.

Did this have something to do with your monster’s attachment level, which was said to exist as an Easter egg feature? In that case, perhaps it would be better if I fed him foods that he *did* like.

“You probably won’t get anything this tasty again for a while, though,” I mumbled under my breath. I had gotten the juice from Alyssa for free, but normally this stuff was 500 G a pop—hardly something I could afford daily.

“Now, on to the next one.”

With the ingredients I currently had, my viable concocting options were medicine and low-grade potions.

“Might as well start with some medicine.”

And step up the quality while I’m at it. I figured I could make the pills without assistance now that I’d made them a few times. The steps were all the same, anyway.

I mixed some four-star salve-making plants and purified water together, then ground them to a paste. Lastly, I infused the gooey substance with a bit of magic.

“Five stars? For real?”

“*Your Concoct level has increased.*”

As I suspected, the higher the quality of your ingredients, the more XP you gained during crafting. My Concoct skill shot up a whopping two levels at once —though it probably helped that I was so low level to begin with.

```
Name: Medicine
Rarity: 1 / Quality: 5★
Effect: Recovers 15 HP. (10-minute cooldown)
```

It seemed like medicine recovered only one additional HP for every one-star increase. I guessed this was why it was said to be useful only in the beginning of the game.

So what, though? What mattered was that I’d produced a grade-A product! It turned out that crafting things manually *did* produce higher quality results, provided you could make them properly.

“Let’s add a little twist next.”

Unlike Auto Mode, Manual Mode didn’t provide any assistance. On the flip side, that gave you more room to be creative. You could add ingredients that weren’t included in the recipe or tweak the crafting process to produce all sorts of alterations. If you succeeded at creating a new dish, you could add it to your

inventory as one of your very own original recipes, which was the kind of thing every nerd dreamed of.

Now then, how shall I go about experimenting?

Why not check the forums, you say? Boooring! Unless I was risking an ultra-rare, once-in-a-lifetime ingredient— in which case I would be sure to scour every source of information possible—coming up with ideas yourself and experimenting was part of the fun. Since I was only making medicine and potions for now, consulting the forums was a last resort. Besides, the devs might have released some new recipes or methods of concocting with the official launch. I wanted to do things my way first, without any help.

“Maybe I’ll try mixing it more.”

I dumped the ingredients into the mortar and ground them together with a pestle. Usually, I’d stop grinding once the ingredients were all mashed up, but this time, I continued mixing until the mixture became runny.

“Hmm, guess that didn’t work.”

Unfortunately, that resulted in no changes to the medicine I made. Although it still had a five-star rating, I couldn’t say it was worth the effort, considering I’d spent five times longer than usual making it.

“Get real. I can’t expect to succeed on the first try. Moving on!”

This time, I transferred the liquid into a pot and tried simmering it on a portable stove, both of which had come included in my simple cooking kit. I worried that switching over to cooking utensils halfway through might cause some problems, but thankfully, that didn’t seem to be the case. Once most of the water had evaporated, I returned the mixture to the mortar and infused it with magic.

“What *is* this? Looks like medicine, but...”

```
Name: Medicine (Powder)
Rarity: 1 / Quality: 3★
Effect: Recovers 17 HP. (10-minute cooldown) - Status
```

Ailment: Thirst

All of my attempts thus far had resulted in items in pill form, but this time, I had managed to produce some powdered medicine. Was it because I'd boiled off the excess water? It gave the user more HP, but also a negative status effect in exchange.

Thirst was a type of status ailment that occurred in dry areas such as deserts. It lowered your stats until you drank water and also made you incredibly thirsty. Why would I use an item that had way more negative effects than positive, though? Unless I had no other choice, that is.

"As far as experiments go, I *guess* you could call it a success?"

All right, let's keep the momentum going. This time I tried the opposite operation, straining the mashed-up ingredients with a cheesecloth. Unfortunately, I didn't have the right type of cloth on hand, so I improvised by using the hem of my Blue Robin Robe. I wrapped the gloopy mixture in my robe, squeezed hard, and extracted the liquid from it.

"It worked, but..."

My robe was now stained green, and its durability had dropped slightly. Well, that could be fixed if I repaired the durability...right? It would suck if I had to walk around in a green-stained robe forever...

"I'll cross that bridge when I get to it. Gotta concoct this item first."

Name: Medicine (Liquid)

Rarity: 1 / Quality: 3★

Effect: Recovers 8 HP. (5-minute cooldown)

Interesting. This time, I got liquid medicine packaged in a neat little bottle. God knows where *that* came from. Although it recovered less HP, it had a shorter cooldown.

"Hmm. Looks like there's plenty of room for improvement. Didn't know there

was so much to concocting. Let's try experimenting with low-grade potions next."

I started preparing for the next round of experiments, grinning at the two types of medicine that had been added to my original recipe folder.

Time to put my newfound knowledge to use.

I had to say, I was pretty excited. The last time I had experimented like this was in high school. I had to be careful, however, since I only had two each left of my medicinal herbs and life sunflowers.

"Let's see... How about I tweak the recipe before mixing everything together?"

I recalled the last potion I made having some residue at the bottom. I wanted to try and get rid of that.

First, I removed the thick veins of the medicinal herbs and life sunflowers, as I only needed the soft leafy parts for my concoction. I hoped it didn't turn out that all the medicinal properties were concentrated in the bits I just removed. Next, I brought some purified water to a boil. According to my assessment, this did not alter its properties any. I wondered what would happen once I used it for potion-making.

The remaining steps were the same as medicine: I just had to mix the ingredients together and infuse them with magic.

```
Name: Low-Grade Potion
Rarity: 1 - Quality: 5★
Effect: Recovers 40 HP. (10-minute cooldown)
```

All right! Five stars, baby! What did I do right? The ingredients were exactly the same as the three-star potion I made last time. I knew that I'd gained one star by concocting in Manual Mode—where did the other star come from?

"Let's try adding the purified water as is."

This time, I ended up with a four-star low-grade potion.

“Looks like boiling the water affects the results.”

That was a neat discovery, although I probably could have found that information online.

Was that all I could do for now? *Wait a minute,* I thought, *I should dry some plants as well.* While dried ingredients couldn’t be propagated, they improved the overall quality of crafted products. I might be able to take advantage of this fact and boost the ratings of my items even further. Fortunately, I still had some low-quality poison hemlock and paralyzing plants left.

“Olto, do you know anything about drying stuff?” I asked him.

“Mm?”

“No?”

“Mm...” Olto hung his head.

“Hey, no need to look so glum. I don’t know anything either.”

My final experiment was to leave the poison hemlock and paralyzing plants in a well-ventilated area. If my hunch was correct, stuff like this typically took around twenty-four hours to dry.

“This place seems nice and breezy.”

I hung the plants from the wall of the toolshed on my farm. This area was well-lit, so it seemed good enough.

I guessed that was about it. *Guess I’ll head out and make use of my time in the meanwhile.*

“I should fill in that map on my way to the Farming Guild.”

Leaving the farm to Olto, I decided to stroll around the Town of Beginnings by myself and continue working on the map.

The South District seemed like a reasonable place to start, seeing as that was where our farm was located. I also made sure to deliver some spinach to the Farming Guild on the way. My guild rank was supposed to go up once I was done with this mapping quest.

After several hours of walking, I had covered about half of the South District.

“Man, this town is larger than I thought.”

If I were to simply walk from one end of the Town of Beginnings to the other, it would probably take less than an hour. However, strolling down all of the streets and filling in the map took considerably more time than I expected. Even so, there was enough to see while walking to keep my interest.

The town’s realism was especially evident during daytime. The cobblestone streets felt rough and bumpy beneath my feet, and grass sprung up from between the cracks. Rocks in the shade were covered with moss, while weeds in sunny areas sprouted tall. Even the walls had newer bricks in places that appeared to have been patched. The attention to detail was really something. If you wanted to feel like you were on vacation in Europe, all you had to do was log in to the game and stroll around this town.

“Oops, didn’t realize how far I’d come.”

Before I knew it, the Magical Beasts Guild was right in front of me. Given its remote location, situated on the border of the South and West Districts, it was obvious it didn’t rank very highly in terms of social status.

While I was already here, I decided to enter the guild. The scenery outside was great, but I’d been walking for some time now and was about due for a change of pace.

“Hi.”

“Welcome to the Magical Beasts Guild.”

The woman that welcomed me wasn’t the raven-haired beauty, Barbara, but a charming, freckled blonde bombshell. I half-expected a thick American accent out of her.

“Where’s Barbara?”

“She’s not here now. She’s on her lunch break.”

Huh. I figured event characters and guild receptionists wouldn’t change, as was the case with most RPGs. I guessed even NPCs had to take breaks if you wanted to keep things realistic.

“Might as well check out the available quests while I’m already over here.”

The last time I came, I hadn't bothered checking the whole list. I doubted there'd be anything new after only half a day, but still, it'd be nice if I could find something.

"Hmm. Guess there aren't any new quests after all."

There were, however, a few that caught my eye. I had ignored these quests last time because they seemed difficult to complete, but now felt like a good time to attempt them.

"I can probably do this one alongside the mapping quest."

```
Labor Quest
Requirement: Pick up litter in town.
Reward: 300 G
Time Limit: Three days
```

The quest sounded pretty underwhelming; the description further stated that the Magical Beasts Guild simply wanted someone to pick up the trash in the areas outside of the Central Square so that the monsters they were taking care of wouldn't accidentally eat them during their walks.

What are they, dogs?! Not that I was complaining, though. It was just the thing I was looking for! I accepted the quest, and received a surprisingly capacious item basket with straps along with a set of ordinary-looking tongs from the receptionist. So I was supposed to use these, huh? I certainly looked the part of a garbage collector. That, or an old man picking chestnuts in autumn.

"Well, good luck. Your quota is one hundred pieces."

"Roger that."

Perhaps I should start by searching the area around the guild. What sort of trash were we talking about in the first place? Empty cans? No sooner had I wondered that than I discovered something in front of the guild. It was a small pebble that I would surely have missed under normal circumstances.

“Is this trash?”

It appeared that litter was indicated by a green marker, now that I’d accepted the quest. Other pebbles were left unmarked, so it looked like I couldn’t just pick up any old piece of junk. This quest could turn out to be more complicated than I thought, but no matter. *Challenge accepted!*



“Okay, let’s fill in the map and pick up some trash.”

What kind of lame-o collected *garbage* in a VR game? I had to do it if I wanted those contribution points and XP, though. I continued to mindlessly pick up trash, which included a variety of items such as withered grass and broken vases. Once I’d gathered over twenty-odd items, I checked the map, which indicated that I was almost done with the South District.

“Next stop, the West District.”

I moved to the next area and resumed my litter-picking task while walking through the West District. Both quests were going swimmingly at the moment. There were, however, a few things that bugged me.

“Hey, isn’t that...?”

“It’s Silver-Haired. I’m sure of it.”

“S-Silver-Haired? You mean...?”

“A silver-haired Tamer without a monster...”

I felt like everyone was staring at me, and there were whispers here and there. Okay, no, it wasn’t *just* a feeling; I was certain that I was the center of attention. These people obviously knew who I was.

Mirei had supposedly leaked my information to around fifty players. The gossip network would have grown even further if those fifty had blabbed to their friends and acquaintances. And there you had it—an entire village of people who knew my secret. If the first fifty players had each talked to five people, and those two hundred and fifty had done likewise, that meant there were *at least* fifteen hundred and fifty people who knew my identity.

Rumors were terrifying. I was starting to feel like everyone I saw knew about me, although I *could* just be overreacting...

“Not like there’s anywhere to run to, though. Just gotta ignore them,” I sighed.

I was sure they’d all forget about me once an event started, so I just had to bear with it until then. At least, I *hoped* that would be the case. *Spare me!* I begged as I continued on my way, trying my best to ignore the blatant stares.

I stopped caring so much once I lost myself in my tasks. By nightfall, I was completely immune to the gawkers, and I was able to casually shrug off any whispering I heard on the way.

“That’s mostly it for the West District.”

The problem was that while my mapping quest was smooth sailing, finding garbage was proving to be a challenge. I had only managed to collect twenty-two pieces, despite having walked all over the West District.

“At this rate, I’ll clear all four districts and still not make my quota.”

If there were twenty-odd pieces of trash per district, that added up to roughly eighty pieces in total. That was far from my goal of one hundred.

I had, however, noticed something along the way.

“I can *definitely* see a green marker over there.”

The spot in question was a canal about seven to eight meters wide, which ran parallel to the main street located in the center of each district. A green marker was bobbing in and out of the water.

“Hup!”

I crouched down by the side of the canal and attempted to pick up the piece of trash using my tongs. Thankfully, the item was floating close to the edge, so I didn’t have to wade in.

“Gotcha!”

My guess was correct—the green marker turned out to be trash. While the end seemed nearer in sight, this discovery was also bad news.

“Means there’s most likely more trash hidden in the canals, right?”

I was able to find this scrap from the shore since it was in the shallow end, but I couldn’t say the same for trash buried deeper in. That meant I would have to go into the water at some point.

“Guess that’s it for today.”

It was already past 10 p.m. Darkness had cloaked the entire area.

I’d gotten so caught up in picking rubbish that I’d totally missed my chance to

see the town during golden hour. That was a shame—I vowed to catch the sunset tomorrow. That being said, the town was captivating at night as well. Between the streetlights and starry night sky, the medieval European-esque town was a marvelous sight to behold. Still, that didn't change the fact that it was already nighttime. Wading into the canals to collect garbage was out of the question.

Due to the game's commitment to making everything as realistic as possible, the bottom of the canals was coated with some sort of slippery, mosslike substance. I doubted I could complete my task in the dark without any incident. Worst-case scenario, I might even die an impossibly embarrassing death by drowning in the canal.

As if people weren't talking shit about me already. I could never live it down if that happened.

However, entering the canals seemed unavoidable if I wanted to meet my goal of one hundred pieces of trash.

"...Tomorrow. I'll wait until it gets light."

I logged in to the game at sunrise the following day.

The seeds Olto and I had planted the previous day had grown and were ready for harvest. I had, however, made one unfortunate discovery.

"Can't we grow anything higher than five stars?" I asked Olto.

"Mm-mm," he shook his head in reply. Five stars appeared to be the limit for crops grown on our farm.

"Do you know why, Olto? Are you not skilled enough?"

"Mm! Mm-mm!"

Olto grabbed my robe and jumped up and down in protest as if to say it wasn't his fault.

"Chillax! I was just kidding!"

He then squatted down and began patting the ground.

“Something to do with the soil?”

“Mmm,” Olto nodded. *Bingo.* So the soil was the culprit, eh?

“Well, can’t do anything about that. Guess five stars is good enough, though. It’ll still rake in the cash.”

Aside from the various herbs, there was a strange clump of grass. It looked like Olto had planted something in the one remaining slot.

“...Some kinda weed?”

No matter how many times I tried to assess it, “Weed” was the only result I got. What the heck was it? The plant didn’t have any flowers, and its leaves were similar to that of basil.

“Hmm. What *is* this? Did Olto plant some random weed to try and raise his Farming skill?”

Although it had the highest rating available—a whopping ten stars—it was still a weed. It didn’t matter how high-quality it was if it didn’t have any effect. It was probably on the same level as rocks and other miscellaneous baubles.

The more I looked at it, the more it reminded me of basil. Actually, I was pretty sure it was. It couldn’t be anything other than that.

“Hmm.”

I plucked the weed and put it into my mouth, then slowly chewed on it. Even if it turned out to be poisonous, I doubted it’d be enough to kill me.

The next instant, I froze in shock.

“It *is* basil!”

The taste was undeniably that of fresh basil. I was sure of it, as it tasted like the basil I’d grown at home before. No matter how many times I tried, though, my assessment still told me it was nothing but a weed.

“Huh? How...? It’s just a weed, right?”

There was a weed outside our farm that resembled a bird’s-eye speedwell. I pulled it out and bit into it, only to spit it out immediately.

“Blegh! Yuck!”

That was definitely a weed. It tasted earthy and bitter, not to mention it made my tongue tingle. You could hardly consider it edible. Data-wise, this weed and the one from our farm were exactly the same, so why did they taste different?

"*You have successfully grown and harvested a weed. You have fulfilled the requirements to unlock a new skill.*"

As I stood there racking my brain, I heard an announcement inside my head. It looked like I had fulfilled some sort of requirement, thanks to Olto. I looked through my list of skills and found one with a star next to it, a sign that it had been acquired within the last twenty-four hours.

"Plant knowledge?"

The description merely stated that it granted you knowledge of the plants of this game. Based on what I'd seen so far, though, I imagined it was some kind of ability that allowed you to differentiate weeds from one another.

"Hm... Costs two points."

Since I currently had four skill points, I *could* obtain it if I wanted to, but... I wanted to save my points for acquiring combat skills later on.

That being said, I was intrigued. Acquiring Plant Knowledge might enable me to find new ways to use weeds. Besides, I didn't think I could focus on the game if I left my curiosity unsatisfied.

"Aight, let's do it!"

The moment I obtained the skill, the name of the weed in my hand changed to "Basilil." Moreover, the Effect section now bore the words "Edible" in addition to "None."

```
Name: Basilil
Rarity: 1 / Quality: 10★
Effect: None. Edible.
```

It was called a "basilil," but judging from its taste, it seemed safe to assume that it was the same as basil.

Excited by this discovery, I assessed the other weeds around the farm, which were all properly named now. Most of them had a six-star rating or above. I also found some more basilil. I wasn't sure where Olto got his hands on basilil seeds, but apparently they could be found all over the Town of Beginnings.

As I carried on with my assessment, I came across an interesting weed.

```
Name: Tulip
Rarity: 1 / Quality: 7★
Effect: None. For decorative purposes only.
```

Decorative purposes, eh? Well, it *was* nice to look at. I wondered if there was any chance I could sell it. Players might ignore a weed like this without so much as a glance, but NPCs might show some interest. *Maybe I should try growing some tulips?* I thought.

I gave Olto the tulip bulb I just plucked, which he proceeded to propagate into two. So, propagation was possible.

I had to say, though, it was kind of weird that even tulips could be considered weeds if they had no special effects. On the other hand, edible and fragrant weeds like basilil might be useful for cooking.

"Might be a good idea to grow weeds when I can. I'll start with some basilil and tulips."

Thanks to these humble weeds, I had made several new discoveries. There really was a lot to this game.

"Okay, let's get today's batch over and done with."

Time to get experimenting again! For starters, I concocted the following items using Auto Mode, all of which I was attempting to concoct for the first time: Paralyzing Potions, Poison, and Hemorrhaging Potions. They were beginner-friendly recipes, and easy enough to make.

Once again, I tried various cooking methods, such as mixing the ingredients differently and parboiling them, but to no effect. On top of that, higher-quality

ingredients proved to be more of a challenge to make use of, the ratings of the finished products not improving as much as I would've liked them to.

The poison and paralyzing potion I made had a five-star and four-star rating, respectively. Their quality was still fairly high, though, and my Concoct and Cooking skills had leveled up, so I guessed the results weren't too shabby. My biggest discovery was that using cooking utensils during concoction raised your Cooking skills. Regardless, since I was using five-star ingredients, I assumed I'd be able to produce a six-star quality item if I did things right. This called for further research.

Also, you didn't think I was done experimenting, did you?

"Meet my assistant for the day: Olto the Gnome!"

"Mm-mm!" Olto exclaimed, punching the air.

"Wow, you seem pumped."

"Mmm."

I decided to put Olto's Luck to the test.

I handed him the leftover low-quality ingredients and tasked him with stirring things—an easy enough process. Olto moved the pestle back and forth, clearly enjoying himself. He looked just like a little boy, playing in the weeds.

Watching him brought back one of my childhood memories of gathering weeds and grinding them to a pulp, resulting in a weird, amorphous blob. I had then applied that paste to my friend's wound like some kind of Chinese herbal remedy, and was smacked by my parents until I cried...

"Mm?" Olto looked at me questioningly.

"Oops, now's not the time to stroll down memory lane. Whatcha got?"

"Mmm."

"You ground them up just fine, buddy."

Despite his lack of Concocting skills, Olto was able to help me with the process. Unfortunately, I didn't get the results I was hoping for. If anything, the quality of the finished product had decreased thanks to my unskilled assistant.

“Hmm. It was a long shot anyway.”

“Mm...”

“Don’t worry, it’s not your fault. I’m the one who made you do it.”

I could put his Luck to the test some other time. While I had no clear prospects, I was sure something good would come of it.

“Phew, all done now. Guess I’ll go to Alyssa’s while Olto’s working on the farm.”

I decided to make a trip to Alyssa’s store to sell the low-grade potions, poison, paralyzing potions, and hemorrhaging potions we made today. *Wait, I should check the plants I was drying before I go*, I thought. I assessed the herbs I’d hung from the wall of the toolshed, which showed no apparent changes. They were just regular poison hemlock and paralyzing plants.

“Still the same, huh?”

Was I missing something after all? Or did I have to dry them for longer? *Oh well, I’ll leave them for a few more days.*

“I’m heading out for a bit. Take care of the rest for me,” I told Olto.

“Mm-mm,” he replied.

I left Olto in charge of our farms and made my way to Alyssa’s stall.

“Hi,” I greeted Alyssa.

“Oh hello, Yuto. What brings you here today?”

“I’d like to sell these. How much do you reckon they’ll fetch?”

“Holy cow! These are top-grade! Wh-Where’d you get them?” she exclaimed.

“Huh? They that amazing?”

Sure, they were high-quality for a rookie like me, but I hadn’t expected a former beta tester to get such a shock.

“Well, duh! Five-star poisons are, like, top-ranking Craftspeople quality! The most I’ve ever gotten is six stars, and only a handful at that!”

“I-I see.”

I'd better not tell her about my farm then. It seemed like a critical piece of information, so it was probably best to keep it to myself until my farm took off.

I was surprised that other crafter-types didn't produce much higher-quality items, though. It most likely wasn't a matter of skill, but ingredients. I had Olto and my plant booster to thank for that.

"Well, I have my ways."

"Aww... Oh, well. I totally understand you not wanting to give up your precious secrets. You're selling these to me, though, right?"

"That's what I'm here for."

Spraying your weapon with some of these items would temporarily grant a status ailment attribute. Not exactly something I needed at the moment, given that fighting was off-limits.

"I can buy the five-star poisons, paralyzing potions, and hemorrhaging potions for 600 G, and the four-star ones for 350 G."

"Seriously? That much?"

"Of course. The higher the quality, the more effective the item. After all, you can give bosses status ailments in this game, even if the chances are pretty low. Items with higher ratings have a better chance of granting negative status effects and are super effective in early boss battles, so frontliners would do anything to get their hands on them. Even master-level NPCs can't create anything higher than five stars, so the prices skyrocket for six-star items and above."

I had no idea. That made sense, though. Who wouldn't want to use an item that could poison or paralyze bosses, even if it was only in the early stages of the game? Aiming for a six-star rating might be a smart move.

"Okay. The five-star low-grade potion will be 650 G, the four-star 400 G. With medicine, it doesn't really matter how high the quality gets; 50 G apiece is the highest I'm willing to go."

Medicine sure was cheap. *Maybe I should keep them instead of selling them.* The rest could go, though. I wanted to make some cash fast.

“Also, these green food rations are 10 G each.”

“...For real?”

“Mhm. You made them with spinach, didn’t you? No one wants to buy these—they’re absolutely revolting. Once in a while, someone who wants to torture themselves or has a high tolerance will buy them, but that’s about it.”

It looked like the food rations were notorious for their hellishly disgusting flavor. I didn’t want to eat anymore of them either, so I might as well sell them if I could.

“That’ll be 3,230 G altogether.”

It seemed like my plan to make a killing with my farm was finally taking off. *Heh heh heh, this is the life!* Although Alyssa was looking at me strangely, I couldn’t help but grin.

After selling her my potions and medicines, I returned to the farm to help Olto. Once our work was finished, it was back to mapping and picking up trash.

“We’ll tackle the North District today.”

The North District was pretty much uncharted territory. The only time I had passed through that area was on the day I first logged in and headed to the Northern Plains. According to the map, its layout was similar to the South and West Districts, so I doubted I’d get lost.

“Let’s go!”

“Mm-mm!”

Olto was joining me today. I figured we’d find more trash if there were two of us, plus we might stumble upon some interesting weeds.

Stopping to assess each plant for its usefulness made the time pass by quickly. Shortly after noon, we had filled about half of the map. However, I was starting to feel mentally drained. We’d been walking the whole time, and being on the lookout for items used up a lot of my energy. I was getting a bit bored too. Still, thanks to Olto, I managed to not give up on the tedious task.

“Mmm, mm-mm-mmm-mmm.”

Having him humming cheerfully by my side gave me the motivation to keep going, even when I was fed up with mapping. If I had been on my own, I would have given up by now and come up with some excuse to take a break.

“You don’t look tired at all,” I commented.

“Mm!”

If anything, he seemed to be getting more excited walking around town. He now had a spring in his step. Other players also smiled at the sight of Olto humming and skipping. *Guess no one can resist his cuteness.* That didn’t change the fact that I was almost at my limit, though.

“Maybe I oughta do something different for a change...”

Was picking the trash in the canals my only option? If I decided to go that route, I’d have to do it while it was light outside and could still see properly.

“Is it safe to go into the canals, though?”

First of all, how deep was it? I could tell that the riverbank was shallow, but how about the middle? It probably wasn’t *that* deep, since it wasn’t even big enough to fit a boat, but...

“Hmm...”

“Mm? Mm-mm?”

As I stood in front of the water, weighing my options, Olto suddenly nudged me from behind. He apparently couldn’t understand why I wasn’t going in.

“Hey, no pushing! Quit it!”

“Mm! Mm-mm!”

I said, *don’t push!* Why was he pushing me even harder?!

“W-Wait! I mean it! Stop pushing me!”

“Mm?”

Olto cocked his head as if to ask, *Huh? You don’t want me to push you?*

“Where’d you learn how to do comedy?”

“Mmm.” Olto scratched his head sheepishly.

“Er, that wasn’t a compliment.”

“Mm?”

“Quit acting so surprised.”

Watching Olto made me forget all of my worries. I felt like an idiot getting worked up over nothing. Besides, hadn’t I made up my mind to do my very best with him?

If people want to gossip, then be my guest! I’m doing things my *way!* Seeing Olto gave me just the (figurative) push I needed. My next move? Scavenging sewage sludge.

I decided to start at the end of the North District’s canal and make my way down towards the Central Square.

“Can’t believe I’m playing a game just to collect garbage and trawl in the mud...”

I already had enough rumors racing around about my title: this was just icing on the cake.

“Eh, no point fretting about it now.”

I waded into the canal to get an idea of how deep it was.

“Okay, not too deep.”

The water was deepest in the middle, but even then it only came up to my belly button.

“Mm-mm! Mm-mm!”

“Olto! Don’t push yourself! You look like you’re about to drown!”

“Mm.”

“Oh, so you *can* swim.”

I was about to help Olto, who had been floundering with his head barely above water, when he began doing a breaststroke. Even though he didn’t have Swimming skills listed, it looked like he could still swim. Man, I almost freaked out for a second there.

We then began picking up the trash in the canal. Unfortunately, the green markers were completely submerged in water and were only visible if we got close enough. It seemed unlikely that we'd be able to find them at night.

Heading south down the canal to the Central Square took us over two hours, during which time we only managed to gather five pieces of trash. That wasn't worth our time and effort at all. If we collected five pieces each in all of the canals, though, that would amount to twenty in total, which meant we'd reach our goal of one hundred.

"Hmm, might as well get it over with."

I set out to pick up the litter in the south and west canals as well, and was able to collect a total of sixteen pieces in the end. However...the reactions I got were far from positive. I could have ignored them if they'd just been whispering, but some of the players who were aware of my identity openly jeered at me. That big old basket on my back certainly didn't help.

"That respawning bastard really is something else. Can you believe he's picking up *trash* in a game?"

"For real. That's Silver-Haired for ya!"

"Bwa ha ha! You're the best, Silver-Haired!"

Grr, keep talking! It looked like deleting a few idiots' accounts didn't do much to get rid of the trolls!

There was something else that bothered me more than their taunts, though.

"*Silver-Haired?* They talking about *me*?"

True, I *had* received the title, Silver-Haired Pioneer... Was that their nickname for me? Hm, seemed it could take longer than I thought for the rumors to subside.

"Nah, it's probably just them."

Oh, how naive I was.

I continued to eavesdrop on the people whispering about me, and every single one of them referred to me as "Silver-Haired."

The equation probably went something like: Silver-Haired equals joke title equals me. Even players who didn't know who I was might catch someone else calling me Silver-Haired and go, *Oh, that's the guy with the stupid title.*

"Just carry on..." I heaved a weary sigh.

It wasn't as if I could do anything anyway. I hadn't expected to get a nickname based on my title of all things, though... I wished I'd been dubbed something cooler.

"Mm-mm."

As I wallowed in my misery, Olto gently tapped me on the leg, as if to cheer me up.

"Thanks, Olto."

If I asked people not to call me by that name, I'd only be giving them more ammunition. Ignoring them was my best bet.

"Guess we could head back to the North District and resume mapping."

Tuning out the chatter around me had allowed me to focus on collecting garbage. If I kept this up, I could finish mapping out the North District, and pick up all the trash there. At least there was one silver lining.

Sadly, it was already after sunset.

"Let's wrap things up tomorrow."

"Mm."

After logging in again, I dove back into my crafting, something which was quickly becoming second nature. Both my Cooking and Concocting skills were leveling up nicely.

"Y'know, wasn't I supposed to be a *Tamer*?"

Somehow, out of all my skills, my Concoct level was currently the highest.

Whoops, almost forgot to check on my dried herbs before heading out.

"Huh? Garbage?"

The poison hemlock and paralyzing plants that I'd left to dry on the wall had

darkened in color and were now labeled Trash. They were pure rubbish, which wouldn't even count towards my trash-picking quest. There was nothing to do except chuck them in the bin.

"...Well, that didn't pan out. Suppose I should check the forums before I screw that up again."

Whatever, moving on. I decided to pay Alyssa a visit to sell the stuff I'd made. Though I was feeling a bit dejected, my mood gradually improved as I walked. Encountering a few bumps along the way was inevitable when experimenting. *Failure breeds success.* I was sure this lesson would come in handy one day.

I arrived at the square and sold my items at Alyssa's store as usual. I also replenished my supply of honey dumplings for Olto, at 50 G apiece.

Purchases aside, I still managed to net 4,450 G. *All right!* I now had over *15,000* G! Today was the day I got a new farm and a mushroom log!

However, I still had another day of mapping ahead of me first. In order to buy mushroom logs, I needed to raise my guild rank. Today's destination was the East District, which I had been putting off.

"Whoa. Hits you different seeing it up close." I sighed as I gazed up at the enormous tree, the symbol of the East District.

This district was totally unlike the others, both in architecture and scenery. *Better check the map to see what the terrain is like.* The first thing that stood out was the massive lake that occupied the northern area of the East District. The Aquatics Guild was located here; there you could fish and practice driving a boat.

Just beyond the eastern shore, beside the outer walls, was a small patch of woods managed by the Forest Guild. While there was nothing stopping players from entering it, it wasn't exactly a treasure mine or anything. Members of the Forest Guild used it every now and then for practice, but that was about it.

Standing almost smack in the middle of the East District was a giant tree called the Lakeside Sequoia, officially 256 meters tall. The story went that this tree produced the water filling the lake, the canals, and the outer moats of the city. Although this towering giant was visible from anywhere in town, seeing it

up close really blew you away. The roots alone were as thick as a regular tree trunk, and the sight of them entwined with one another, snaking around and through the lake, was impressive. Water cascaded from a massive hole in the trunk into the body below, which made for a truly spectacular and whimsical view.

I could have stared at the sight all day, but I had to get moving.

"Time to get cracking with these quests."

I traipsed through the East District, plugging away at filling in the map. The varied landscape kept the walk interesting. At this rate, I could probably get the job done early. As I silently collected trash, I heard a *Ding-dong!* sound from a loudspeaker.

"*This is an announcement from the management team.*"

"Huh. What could it be?"

"*Today marks four days in-game since the official launch of LJO. We would like to share the data we've collected so far.*"

What do you know? It was already noon. Ninety-six hours had passed in the game—exactly one day in real life.

"Data, eh?"

I opened the attachment I'd just received.

"Wow. They've even listed how many players have gotten each skill."

The player with the highest base level was now at level 18. They had to be a beta tester *and* a total recluse. As much as I respected their efforts, I didn't feel as envious as before. After all, I'd made up my mind to go at my own pace with Olto.

I scanned the rest of the list to see if any data might be relevant to me.

The first thing I looked for was data related to titles. There were only five players who had received titles so far; naturally, that included me, as the one with the greatest number of deaths. Although I had mixed feelings about my title, it was still nice to feel like I belonged to an exclusive club.

Next was the number of Tamers. Out of 33,076 players, there were only 78 of us. That meant our population was only about one-tenth that of the largest group, Soldiers, which comprised 803 members. Given how unpopular Tamers were, that wasn't too surprising. Still, it was kind of sad.

Another thing I noticed was how many more Summoners there were than Tamers, probably owing to a popular series whose main character was a Summoner. There were 541 Summoners—about seven times more than the number of Tamers. For some reason, that really irked me.

The player with the most tamed monsters currently had seven beasts. I had nothing but envy for this person. Here I was with only one monster, whereas this lucky jerk already owned seven. Sure, Olto was cute and hardworking and all, but as a Tamer, I wasn't about to be satisfied with just one beast.

Tamers could tame more monsters by leveling up their Monster Taming and Command abilities. At level 1, you could tame one monster for each of those skills. After that, you could tame one additional monster whenever either skill level reached a multiple of five. Since my Monster Taming ability was at level 5 and my Command ability was at level 3, I could, in theory, tame up to three monsters. Seeing as I possessed zero combat skills, however, that was going to prove to be a challenge...

Hmm, what else? I wanted to read up on farming-related stuff too. The top farm-owner currently had twelve farms and even owned land in other towns as well. I supposed that was fair for an actual Farmer-type player.

Other than that, there wasn't anything in particular that caught my eye. I *definitely* didn't want to see how much money other people had. I looked forward to more data updates, though, which were scheduled to be released once every four days from now on.

Additionally, there was apparently going to be some sort of event starting in ten days—three days in real-world time. While the details hadn't been disclosed yet, it was set to occur in the Town of Beginnings. What kind of event could it be? Given my current state, though, it was possible I might not even be able to participate. *Better work on raising those stats.*

"Right. Back to the grind," I roused myself. *Only about half of my objectives*

left to go.

Thanks to the lake, which covered approximately half of the landmass of the area, it took less time to map the East District. Once I'd filled in the Central Square, I'd be done with the mapping quest. However, things weren't going as smoothly with my other task.

"I still need five more."

No matter how hard I looked, I couldn't find the five remaining pieces of trash. What I found instead was an interesting shop.

"Um, were you here yesterday?" I asked the shop owner.

"Of course! I've never taken a day off in all the twenty years I've had this place!" he replied.

The store that I had stumbled upon was a florist selling a colorful array of flowers. It was located in one of the alleys off the main street stretching from the Central Square to the East District. There were both single-stem flowers and bouquets available, with a wide variety to choose from. I'd been down this street many times, and I was pretty sure this shop hadn't been here before... I peeked inside, my curiosity aroused.

"Whoa, impressive."

Aside from cut flowers and potted plants, the florist also sold preserved goods such as potpourri, and dried and pressed flowers—basically every kind of flower you could think of. Using my Appraisal skill, I assessed some of the flowers outside the store. Other than their names, the descriptions were all the same, be it cosmos or carnations. Like tulips, they had no effect and were purely for decorative purposes.

Makes sense, though. Without my Plant Knowledge, I probably wouldn't have been able to find this place. After all, without that skill, this florist would just be a weird little store selling weeds. Who knew such a (literally) hidden gem existed!

I took a whiff of something that looked like potpourri, and the scent of lavender tickled my nostrils. I could have fun with these, even if there weren't any visible effects. If I could make use of these kinds of fragrances, I might be

able to use weeds for concoctions and alchemy too. I decided to take a look at the other knickknacks around the shop.

"Is this a pressed flower? And also a bookmark?"

```
Name: Pressed Flower Bookmark (Cosmos)
Rarity: 1 / Quality: 4★
Effect: None. To be used as an accessory.
```

I hadn't realized there was an Accessories category. That was cute. Unlike potpourri, it didn't have any scent, so it really was purely for decoration. The bookmark baffled me, however, as I'd never heard of there being any readable books in LJO.

"Actually, I wonder."

In some games, you could go to the library and learn new skills and recipes from books. I didn't think there were any libraries in this game, but now that I'd seen this bookmark, I was having second thoughts. Perhaps you could find some in later towns. That said, I lacked any form of language skills, which were most likely required to read books. Or was reading another ability that players possessed unconditionally as a basic attribute, just like our Appraisal skill? It could also be that I simply hadn't met the requirements for obtaining a new language.

"Guess I'll buy some potpourri and a bookmark for now."

The total came to a mere 300 G. *Now that's what I call a bargain.* I figured I better try to learn a bit more while I was at it.

"So, are these actually useful for anything?" I asked.

"Hey! Watch your mouth, boy!" the old man NPC glared at me.

Oops. Guess that was kind of rude.

"Sorry, my bad. It's just that they both say 'No effect,'" I hurriedly apologized.

The old man nodded, seeming appeased.

“Eh, no biggie. Are you an otherworldly traveler? Y’all apparently possess some sort of Appraisal skill, if I recall.”

“That’s right.”

“Well, I’m not sure what kind of effects you’re looking for. They’re nice to look at and make good gifts, but that’s about it.”

They really were just ordinary flowers then.

“In that case, do you happen to buy flowers as well?”

“Huh? Do you grow flowers, son?”

“Right now, I’m only growing a few tulips.”

“Tulips aren’t very popular in this town. I can buy them for 10 G apiece, though.”

Talk about chump change. I was better off cultivating basilil in that case; at least I might be able to cook with it. It didn’t seem like I could make a lot of money from weeds.

The old man then showed me some seeds.

“Hey. If you’re growing flowers, think you can grow these?”

“What are those?”

“Wild strawberry seeds.”

“Huh? Strawberries?”

“They’re like regular garden strawberries, but they grow in the wild. They’re not sweet at all, but they still smell nice, so people like to add them to tea. I don’t sell herbs at my place, but I’m kind of fond of these, so I tend to keep ’em in stock. Unfortunately, the old woman who was collecting them for me got sick and had to retire. I’ll pay you 20 G each if you can grow them for me.”

“Why not grow them yourself? Or is it too difficult?”

“Not at all; it’s easy if you own a farm. It’s just that people prefer to grow vegetables. I can’t grow them because I lack the necessary skills. Well, how about it?”

Delivery Quest

Requirement: Grow and deliver ten wild strawberries.

Rewards: 200 G, red mint seeds, and blue mint seeds.

Time Limit: None

True to his word, the wild strawberries were worth 20 G each, which was practically nothing. Regardless, I chose to accept the quest. It felt like a good idea to fulfill residents' requests. Besides, I was curious about the mint seeds. They probably didn't have any special effects, but they were still herbs I hadn't encountered before. Growing both basilil and mint would give me more options.

"Okay. I'll do it," I replied.

"Great! I'm counting on you, my boy!"

With that, I acquired five wild strawberry seeds.

"All right! Let's go find the rest of that garbage!"

Wanting to get the job over with and return to my farm as soon as possible, I wandered in search of trash, braving the curious stares of elves undergoing stealth training in the forest and dwarves fishing by the lake. Despite my best efforts, I was still unable to reach my goal of one hundred. It looked like I had no choice but to search the canal.

"Guess there's no way around it."

The question was, what would I do if I *couldn't* find any trash in the last remaining canal?

"That'd mean I'd have to search the *lake*."

It would suck if I had to dive underwater, seeing as I currently lacked both the equipment and skills necessary.

"Pleeease tell me I can find them in the canal."

I began looking for litter in the East District's canal, praying for a fruitful search. Things went smoothly at first; I managed to find a couple of pieces of

trash. This time, however, I ran into a problem with my mapping.

“Hm? Something’s not right. This bridge isn’t on the map.”

I was looking at a large stone arch bridge that stood over the canal, which was unmarked on the map. While the map in my status menu showed this bridge, it was nowhere to be found on the map I had received for my quest.

“Hmm. Is there something here?”

I’d walked all over town, but hadn’t seen any place like this. Scrutinizing the bridge turned up nothing; there didn’t seem to be anything out of the ordinary.

Could it be rigged in some way? I decided to search the bridge more thoroughly, sensing the possibility of an event.

The next thing I did was dive under the bridge, where I discovered...

“...A door?”

There was an iron door affixed inconspicuously below the bridge. It was obscured by the dark, and was the same grayish color as the stones used for the bridge, which made it almost impossible to see unless you got up close.

I gripped the door handle and pulled.

“No dice...”

Try as I might, the door was either locked or rusted, and showed no signs of budging.

“Do you need a key for this?”

It would probably open during an event or something. I guessed I had no choice but to give up for now.

“Hmm, don’t remember reading anything about this.”

I didn’t recall seeing anything about a landmark like this during my initial research...

Oh well. It wasn’t like I remembered all of the events that were mentioned, so it must have been pretty insignificant. I wasn’t so hardcore of a player that I’d memorize every single subquest, especially the ones I didn’t intend on completing.

“Whatever. I’ll make sure to remember this place, though.”

I gave up on trying to open the door and resumed my garbage-collecting task. My quest was more urgent than some stuck door. The sun was starting to set, too, so I made haste moving through the canal.

“Hey, there we go.”

At last, I had met my goal: one hundred pieces of trash. I was cutting it pretty close; ten more minutes and the sun would have set entirely.

“Just gotta head to Central Square now and fill in the rest of the map.”

After successfully filling in the entire square, I started back towards the guild to make my report, when I heard yet another announcement.

Ding-dong!

“*Congratulations.*”

Huh? What were they congratulating me for? Something good, I hoped.

“*As a reward for not killing a single living being since your first login, you will be awarded the title, ‘Thou Shalt Not Kill.’*”

“Seriously? Another title?”

Weren’t titles pretty hard to obtain? If I remembered correctly, there were only five titleholders at the moment.

“Well, look at me go. Gotta say, though, the way this is written...”

Something about the overall wording reminded me of a certain samurai with an X-shaped scar on his cheek.

How had I managed to obtain this title, though? As per the description, you needed to have zero kills since logging in, but why announce it now? It was currently 6:18 p.m., so it didn’t seem like the time had triggered it. Or, wait. My total in-game playtime was now at 96:02. Maybe it had been at exactly 96:00 when I heard the announcement?

Based on these facts, it seemed like in order to obtain the title, “Thou Shalt Not Kill,” you needed to have spent ninety-six hours in-game from the time you first logged in without killing any monsters or animals. Though it was by mere

coincidence that I had avoided killing anything, this was undoubtedly a stroke of luck.

Awesome! Let's see what this baby gets me!

Title: Thou Shalt Not Kill

Effect: You have gained 3,000 G and four bonus points, as well as a special skill, Hold Back.

Hold Back: Prevents opponent's HP from dropping to zero on your next normal, skill, magic, or item-based attack.

The rewards were better than my first title, the Silver-Haired Pioneer: I had gained additional bonus points, not to mention that Hold Back was a far more useful skill than Flee, especially for Tamers. While lowering your opponent's HP improved your taming success rate, you didn't want to deplete their HP completely and accidentally defeat them. It would be a while before I could make good use of this skill, though.

"Hold on. I can probably sell this info too."

Alyssa might have gotten wind of it by now, but it didn't hurt to try. As tempting as it was to keep things to myself a while longer, money was more important to me. Either way, someone else was bound to discover this title eventually. Making more money to buy land and mushroom logs seemed like a smarter option.

"No time like the present."

I decided to pay Alyssa a visit before reporting back on my quest.

"Busy as always, it seems."

Seeing all of these stalls in the square at night reminded me of a festival. There seemed to be more players, now that five days had passed in-game since the official launch. There were others who had gotten off to a late start, with plenty of newbies around, which was probably why the Town of Beginnings was so crowded. Most of them would likely be moving on to the next town soon, so

the population was probably at its peak right now.

“Hey, Alyssa,” I greeted her.

“Hey. Fancy seeing you here this late,” she replied.

“I come bearing information.”

“Is that so? You never fail to surprise me. Let’s hear it then; I’m excited.”

Well, don’t set the bar too high already. What if she wasn’t impressed?

“Uh, well... You might already know this info, but it’s something to do with titles.”

Upon hearing that, Alyssa twitched, and her expression suddenly turned serious.

“D-Don’t tell me you got another one?” she asked under her breath, after making sure there were no other players nearby.

I was taken aback by her seriousness. I would feel kind of bad if she already knew about this. In fact, I was pretty sure she did...

“Yeah, I did actually,” I replied in an equally small voice.

“Do you also know *how* you obtained it?”

“It’s just a guess, but I think I do.”

“R-Really?”

“Yeah. It happened earli—”

“Gimme a minute,” Alyssa cut me off, thrusting her right hand in front of my face. Her left hand clutched her chest.

“Huh?”

“I need a moment to calm down. I wasn’t expecting such big news,” she wheezed, taking a deep breath.

Over the top much?

“You might already know about it, though.”

“Well, do you see your title here?”

Alyssa showed me a list of titles that the Quick-Eared Cats were apparently selling details about. There were eleven titles altogether, including the three unique titles that had been awarded on the second day. That was a lot fewer than I'd expected. Luckily for me, the new title, Thou Shalt Not Kill, wasn't on the list.

"Is that it?"

"Not very many, eh?"

"Yeah."

"That just shows how difficult it is to obtain titles. It's much harder than you think."

"I had no idea."

"So, how about it? Is it on this list?"

"Nope."

"Seriously? That's amazing!"

Alyssa appeared to have reached the peak of excitement: her cat ears were sticking straight up. LJO sure put a lot of thought into detail. Who knew, maybe my halfling ears moved as well, and I simply hadn't noticed it. Cat ears on beautiful girls were cute, but it was kind of creepy to imagine a guy like me twitching his ears. Or perhaps it wouldn't look that bad since my avatar was good-looking...?



Alyssa's excitement continued to build as I was lost in thought, my eyes glued to her cat ears.

"Ooh, I'm so glad I talked to you! Am I good or what?!!! You don't even get how incredible this is, do you?"

"Guess not."

To be honest, I was baffled by the degree of her enthusiasm.

"Can other people acquire that title as well," she asked, "or is it a first come, first served kinda deal?"

"Don't think so. Pretty sure it's not exclusive."

"You're sure about that?" Alyssa leaned forward and brought her face close to mine.

"Y-Yeah," I replied.

"All right. I'll pay you 3,000 G."

"What?"

"That's how valuable your information is. Scratch that—I'm willing to pay more depending on how useful your tip is and how much you can tell me about the conditions for obtaining this title."

"For *real*?!"

My heart began to beat faster as it finally dawned on me just how much my information was worth.

"So, what kind of title is it? I'd like to see your stats too if possible."

"Sure thing. Here you go. It's called 'Thou Shalt Not Kill.'"

I showed Alyssa my Titles section and told her what I knew so far. I also showed her the log from when I'd acquired my skill and shared my observations on how to obtain this title. As I finished up my explanation, though, she suddenly yelped.

"Wait a minute!"

"What's wrong?"

“This skill...” she gasped, pointing at the Effect section of the title with a quivering finger.

“You’re telling me this isn’t a Hold Back attack, but just Hold Back?”

“Yeah... What about it?”

I had heard of a Hold Back *attack* before. It was a type of wand and mace art that left its target with 1 HP no matter what. My skill, called simply Hold Back, was more advanced in that regard, since it was effective when attacking with items and magic as well.

“...It’s a new skill,” she said.

“Come again?”

“I said, it’s a *new skill*!”

“New skill?”

“...We haven’t found anything like this, not even during the beta test. It’s a totally new skill that no one else has gotten yet!”

Did that mean I was the only person who had obtained it so far? Didn’t that make it a rare skill?

“You’re bluffing.”

“Am not. If you don’t believe me, see for yourself! It’s not on the list that was sent out this morning.”

She had a point. That list had also included the number of people who had obtained each art and skill, so the name should have been on there if at least one person had learned it. I quickly took a look at the data from this morning. As Alyssa implied, there was no art or skill called Hold Back on the list.

“You’ve gotta be kidding.”

“Looks like this skill belongs to you and you alone at the moment.”

This was beyond my imagination. I could scarcely believe it. Who knew it was such an impressive title? Was it true that no one had gotten this during the beta test?

“Well, you’re usually pumped and eager to battle when you’re first starting

out, right?” Alyssa explained. “Even if you don’t fight any monsters, you might obtain food by fishing or hunting. Not killing anything for four whole days since your first login is almost impossible when you don’t have any information to go on.”

“I see.”

“Unless your playstyle is seriously skewed, that is. Like you, for example.”

“R-Right-o.”

I most likely wouldn’t have gotten this title if Olto had been capable of fighting. No one would pass up a chance to fight monsters in the beginning, and very few would probably lose from the get-go. Even if they messed up their character design, they still had time to rebuild their character if they did it immediately. I was sure most people would opt for a redo.

“Will you buy this info then?”

“I’ll buy it for 25,000 G.”

“Didn’t you say three thousand...?”

“That’s including the price of the currently exclusive deets about your skill. Info about the title itself is bound to sell like hotcakes too.”

“But you can’t have killed any monsters since logging in if you want to obtain this title.”

That ruled out almost all of the current players. Would people actually want to buy that sort of information? However, Alyssa seemed fully confident.

“Not to worry. We have roughly ten thousand newbies coming in soon, and in six real world days’ time, we’ll get the second and third waves of players, who number over a hundred thousand. Besides, unless you’re a hardcore gamer, your playtime in real life so far would only amount to half a day at most. Some players are also considering redoing their character build. This is valuable info for people like them. After all, this is a title that’s definitely obtainable.”

And there you had it—I had just earned a surprise 25,000 G. I was rolling in dough!

How should I use this money? Even if I bought another farm and a mushroom

log, I'd still have over 30,000 G left. The possibilities seemed endless. *Time to go and get that log!*

"Right, I'll be going now!" I bowed to Alyssa, ready to take my leave.

"Hey, wait up," Alyssa called out. "What do you say we exchange friend codes?"

"You wanna become friends with *me*?"

"Yep. If we become friends, I'll shoot you a message whenever I have any interesting tidbits to share. In exchange, I want you to sell me any useful info you might have."

"Are you sure? Me, of all people?"

Unlike Alyssa, who was a top ex-beta player, I was merely a newbie who had sort of lucked out.

"Yeah. I'd love to."

"Seriously, I just got lucky this time."

"Well, let's hope your lucky streak continues."

Eh, whatever. I'll take her word for it. Befriending a knowledgeable beta tester hardly seemed like a bad idea.

"Okay, I'll send you my code."

"Thanks."

Alyssa sent me hers as well—a successful exchange.

"Looking forward to more exciting news!"

"Wouldn't count on it if I were you."

Alyssa waved after me, and I left the square with a spring in my step.

Online Forum [Famous Players Megathread] Players Currently Rising to Fame, Part 1

This is a thread that discusses players who are already becoming a household name due to all the ruckus they've been creating.

188: Anonymous

>186

So you don't know Ashihana's whereabouts yet?

189: Poof

Huh? Weren't they in the Southern Town yesterday?

190: Quagsire

Ashihana's constantly on the move in search of ingredients. It's hard to pin down their exact location.

191: Poof

But I was hoping to ask them if they could make me a wand! Bummer.

192: Quagsire

Doubt they will. Ashihana's the kind of person who only makes stuff they want to. Almost everyone who asked Ashihana to make wands for them got shot down. Apparently, they'll take a request or two every now and then, only if you bring them rare items or pitch interesting ideas.

Don't push it though, or you'll end up getting reported,

which is never a fun time lol

193: Dog Who Prefers Cats

One of my friends got Ashihana to make them a bow.

That went down well since they brought some rare wood with them.

194: Poof

Okay, I'll start by looking for some rare wood then.

Got no time to learn a Logging skill though, so I'll probably make do with one of the stalls.

195: Anonymous

Good idea, although there's no telling where Ashihana will be by that time.

196: Quagsire

Unlike Bomber, who's always making bombs in the Western Town. That's practically her home now.

197: Anonymous

Bomber? Oh, you mean Rikyu.

198: Poof

I've heard people call her Pyro.

199: Anonymous

Rikyu has way too many names.

Master of Explosives, Blower-Upper, Bomber, Pyro—that's four already.

Who knows, there might be more that we haven’t heard of yet.

200: Poof

I vote for Pyro.

201: Quagsire

I like Bomber. Her glasses and robe remind me of Huntsman × Huntsman.

Considering how fast she churns out bombs, I bet there’s secretly three of her lmao

---

202: Dog Who Prefers Cats

Guess everyone does associate bombs with her. I vote for Bomber too.

203: Poof

Gotta say, her bombs are super effective. Bet there’s some kind of key to making them. They’re about twice as powerful as the bombs my party members make.

204: Quagsire

Duh. We’re talking about a top alchemist’s prized recipe. All we know is that her process involves Alchemy, Concocting, and Forging skills.

Countless Craftspeople have attempted to recreate her bombs, but none have succeeded so far.

Can’t ask Rikyu for the recipe either since she’s way too socially awkward.

I really hope that her weird chuckling is just part of the role she’s playing.

205: Anonymous

I’m partial to Bomber too.

Obviously, if you were a crafter-type and discovered a special way of making things, you’d want to keep it to yourself. It *does* give you an edge, after all.

While I’d love it if she made more, I’m in no position to tell her to spend all of her spare time making bombs.

206: Quagsire

Honestly, I feel like as long as we paid her enough and gave her the proper facilities, she’d gladly knock herself out lol

But whatever. Shall we move on?

207: Anonymous

Sure. Number seven is the Purple-Haired Adventurer, aka Siegfried.

208: Poof

He’s one of the three unique titleholders, right? I heard he already has a steed. That true?

209: Quagsire

Yep. Apparently, he’s the only player who has one at the

moment. I haven’t seen anyone else with a steed, so it must be true.

210: Poof

Wonder how he got one?

211: Dog Who Prefers Cats

Siegfried and I know each other, so I asked him personally. He told me he spent almost all of his bonus points that he got from being a beta tester on his character build. Still, all he got was a packhorse, the lowest of the low. He seems okay with it, though.

As a side effect, he’s put almost nothing into his other stats, skills, and bonus attributes. His Riding skills make him pretty strong when he’s mounted, but he struggles with mobs like Wild Dogs once he’s on the ground.

212: Poof

I don’t think I want one after all.

213: Quagsire

Why go to all that trouble to get a steed? You can buy one once you reach the latter half of Zone Three, can’t you? No need to rush.

214: Dog Who Prefers Cats

Dude takes his role-playing seriously, and the reason he’s so well-known is because he always announces himself.

The steeds you can obtain in Zone Three are either packhorses, donkeys, or ostriches and are assigned at random. You can’t choose their color either, not to mention

they’re pretty stubborn. As a knight, he was hell-bent on getting an obedient white horse.

If you want a horse, he’ll gladly tell you how to get your hands on one.

His horse’s name is Silver, by the way. Seeing him yell “Hi-Yo, Silver!” is really cringey.

Like, what are you, some kind of Lone Ranger? I thought you were a knight!

215: Anonymous

Well, different strokes for different folks lmao

216: Poof

True that

I have to say, it’s nice how the three titleholders have their own names. Makes it easier to remember them, unlike Pyro.

Kinda annoyed by how many nicknames she has.

217: Dog Who Prefers Cats

You’re really rooting for that name, aren’t you, Poof? lol

But that’s precisely why she has so many monikers. People tend to stick to the ones they like or come up with their own.

The Ruby Red Explorer was also known by many names during beta—Queen Crimson and Queen of Gathering, to name a few.

Nowadays, people just call her Ruby Red Explorer or Ruby Red, though.

218: Knocker

She seems pleased with the moniker. I've also seen her boasting about her title before.

Titleholders stand out, plus they seem kinda special, doncha think? I'm jealous. Although, I guess having a title ain't all sunshine and rainbows.

219: Anonymous

And that brings us to player number eight, Silver-Haired. Out of the bunch, he's the only person who's been attracting negative attention.

220: Dog Who Prefers Cats

I feel sorry for him. His title makes him stand out in a bad way.

His nickname has become widely known, too, which makes info spread further. While his name hasn't been leaked, it's a well-known fact that he's a silver-haired male Tamer.

221: Poof

Some player was leaking his personal info, right?

The devs seem to take that sort of stuff seriously, so I take it they got banned?

222: Knocker

Yup, they got banned, all right. The devs have publicized the details. Their intention is probably to send a message so that sort of thing doesn’t happen again.

Side note, Silver-Haired didn’t call the devs himself. An anonymous player did.

223: Poof

Good job, whoever that was!

People will probably think twice about bothering him now.

224: Dog Who Prefers Cats

From what I heard, it was the top Tamer, Amimin—the fourth player we discussed—who reported the incident. One of her acquaintances apparently saw her make the call, so I’m pretty sure it’s true.

I hear Amimin’s really nice to other Tamers, even though she doesn’t open up to other people at all. I tried to greet her once, but she hid behind a turtle! *sob*

By the way, don’t you think the naming conventions are kinda weird?

We’ve got Silver, and Ruby—but then, Purple? Shouldn’t it be Amethyst or something?

225: Quagsire

Some idiot apparently complained about that to the devs, saying, *Why aren’t they consistent? They should all be the*

same.

They got a reply.

226: Poof

Wow! What'd they say?

227: Quagsire

Shut up, fool. It's the creator's intent! Leave LJO if you have a problem with it!

228: Poof

What?

229: Anonymous

Well, something along those lines. They said it in a really nice way, of course.

The person who filed the complaint was intimidated by their response and stopped making a fuss after that.

230: Dog Who Prefers Cats

Nice going, devs.

231: Quagsire

Well, there are always bound to be players who complain about every little detail. By not giving in to them, they're setting the tone for future cases.

Or, it might just be that they don't give a shit about sucking up to players, since there aren't many in-game purchase options.

232: Poof

In any case, I've made my decision—I'm not getting on the devs' bad side!

233: Anonymous

When did this become a conversation about the devs XD

234: Knocker

What *is* Silver-Haired doing now, anyway?

235: Poof

That's a good question lol. I'd like to know too.

Do you think he's still in the game, considering how he died three times on the first day? He's *got* to have messed up his character build, right?

Maybe he's already had a redo, and Silver-Haired is no more.

236: Anonymous

Nope, he's still playing.

237: Quagsire

If you can call that playing.

Just yesterday, I saw him with a basket on his back picking up trash. I mean, who does that in an RPG?

While I commend him for sticking to his initial build and making the most of his situation, I almost cried at how wistful he looked. I seriously felt like I should be cheering him on.

238: Poof

Picking up trash...? That some sort of quest?

239: Anonymous

Labor Quest

Requirement: Pick up litter in town.

Reward: 300 G

Time Limit: Three days

Never seen anyone else do this quest.

240: Quagsire

I’m not surprised. Three days of your time for a mere 300 G? Who the hell wants to do that?!

Hunting near the Town of Beginnings is a hundred times better than that. Bet the payoff is significantly better, too, considering the amount of XP and money you get.

241: Knocker

You could say that Silver-Haired is a rare breed—even the verifiers are reluctant to do this type of quest.

He truly lives up to his name, Pioneer lol

242: Dog Who Prefers Cats

True. Doing stuff like that is how you make unexpected discoveries.

I’d love Silver-Haired to stick to what he’s doing and

forge his own path.

243: Poof

Agreed. Ignore the haters, and keep up the good work, Silver-Haired!

244: Quagsire

I’m rooting for him too. You could even say I respect the guy; *I* couldn’t do what he’s doing.

If only I could add him to my party and level him up! I’m worried that he’ll actually quit at this rate.

245: Knocker

Looks like y’all are concerned about him after all XD

246: Anonymous

lmao he secretly has a lot of fans, huh?

***

The sudden influx of wealth was making me somewhat reckless with my money; I had already bought and eaten three skewers on the way to the Farming Guild. For food that wasn't even real, it sure tasted amazing.

"Time to make my report," I muttered, back at the guild once again.

I marked the mapping quest as complete, and sure enough, my rank increased by one. I now had more options to choose from at the shop. First off, it was time to buy the item that had been on my wishlist the longest.

"I'd like a mushroom log, please," I told the old man behind the counter.

"Right-o. That'll be 4,500 G," he replied.

I could finally grow some red panther caps. It had been a long and arduous journey.

"I'd like to buy more land too."

Better buy another farm while I could afford it.

"I'll take the 6,000 G one agai— No, hang on. I can afford the 10,000 G option now." If I remembered correctly, the most expensive upgrade came with a barn. "Can you tell me more about that one?"

"Sure, ask away."

I asked the old man all sorts of questions. To start, the barn was apparently more of a wooden shed, roughly the size of a small bedroom. It came with a small desk, chair, and shelving unit, and could also be used as a makeshift home (no renovations allowed). You couldn't store more oversized items in it, nor could you designate it as one of your login destinations, so it really was nothing more than a rest area.

One mildly exciting feature was the automated fertilizer-making machine. At 30 G a bag, fertilizer wasn't by any means expensive, but this would likely save me a bit of change in the long run.

The most important addition was the toolbox, which had an inventory system that monsters could use as well. This would allow Olto to keep the items he

harvested automatically in mint condition while I was gone.

The only downside to this was that the barn took up quite a bit of space, which left you with just ten farming slots. Even so, I was keen on having a barn.

“All right, I’ll take the 10,000 G. Oh, and one 6,000 G grade as well.”

I also bought one 2,000 G patch for growing weeds. No point trying to improve their ratings when they had no special effects. The bare minimum ought to suffice.

“Thanks, sonny.”

I checked the shop’s offerings to see what else I could buy. I was on a shopping spree: all self-control had gone out the window. A typical case of sudden wealth syndrome.

The seeds at the guild were the same as the ones sold at the general store. As I perused the store’s inventory, a bag of 2,000 G premium fertilizer caught my eye. While it could only be used on one square, rather than the entire field, it was ten times more effective than regular fertilizer. Purchases of this item were limited to three bags per person. It also appeared to be quite rare, only restocked once a week.

I currently had 21,220 G. If I wanted it, I could afford it.

“Okay, I’ll take your whole stock of this, plus some blue carrot and amber pumpkin seeds!”

If I had some premium fertilizer, I could speed up the growth process of plants that were slower to mature. Perhaps I could even boost the quality of low-level herbs to five stars. I had already decided I would use the fertilizer on my green peach sapling. *Probably best not to spend any more money right now, though.*

“Better get outta here before I buy anything else.”

I left the shop and went to check on the land I had just purchased. A new patch and a dingy little shed now stood next to the farms I already owned. The barn had appeared instantaneously; I’d reckoned that building it would have taken a few days, but I shouldn’t have been too surprised considering this was a game.

“Mmm! Mm-mm-mm!”

Olto rushed to my side, tugging at my robe and pointing at the barn excitedly. Seeing a shed appear out of thin air was apparently a shock to him.

“Surprised?”

“Mm!”

“Don’t worry. I just bought them at the Guild.”

While it looked like an ordinary shed on the outside, the inside was cleaner than I expected. Finally, I had storage space.

“Awesome! There’s even a fertilizer tank outside.”

Now, what to do with my new farm? I was also unsure whether I should start using the premium fertilizer I just bought. Using it on local plants would be a waste, wouldn’t it? Shouldn’t I save it for rarer, higher-quality crops? Now that I’d come down from my shopping high, I could feel my purse strings tightening again.

“Guess I’ll use it on the green peach for now. I’ll think about the rest later.”

“Mm?”

“For you, Olto. Got you a mushroom log and some premium fertilizer. Use the fertilizer on the green peach.”

“Mm!”

Olto gave me an affirmative salute and carried the mushroom log to the farm. I knew his strength was higher than mine, but it was still a bit nerve wracking to watch him waddling along with a log bigger than himself.

“You can grow these now, right?” I asked.

“Mmm,” he replied, propagating the red panther cap I gave him. Unlike herbs, which transformed into seeds, mushrooms apparently reverted into spore form. The result was a slightly suspicious-looking red powder. Olto sprinkled the powder onto the mushroom log, followed by some water from the well.

“Is that it?”

“Mm.” he nodded confidently.

“If you say so. I trust you.”

The mushrooms were in good hands now. For our new farm, I had Olto propagate the rest of the herbs and weeds I had, and planted them alongside the vegetable seeds I’d purchased.

“Man, look at all these crops. Am I a Tamer or a Farmer?”

Time to head to the Magical Beasts Guild before I forgot who I was. I had to complete my quest and earn those contribution points too.

“See you later, buddy.”

“Mm-mm.”

I bid Olto goodbye and set off for the Magical Beasts Guild. Thinking about it now, the quest I was about to report on was the trash-picking quest... That wasn’t very Tamer-like either. After I marked the quest as complete on the notice board, Barbara called me over.

“I’ll take your garbage now,” she said.

“Here you go.”

I handed her the entire item basket, and she began checking its contents.

“Um, these three aren’t trash. Here, you have them.”

Barbara’s words made me panic for a second, but to my relief, I hadn’t failed my quest. *Phew, thank goodness.* I proceeded to inspect the items she had picked out from the trash.

“Water pumice, eh? Don’t remember picking this up. Where’d it come from?”

This was typical of an RPG event. The next item was a small pouch, which contained seeds inside.

“Those are chamomilé seeds.”

The old me wouldn’t have appreciated them in the least, but now that I was better informed, I was ecstatic. Chamomilé was probably similar to chamomile, in which case it would likely have many uses. I would definitely ask Olto to grow them for me. The last item, however, baffled me. It was a key-shaped item, simply labeled “Unknown Key.” What was it for? As I examined it, wondering

what it might go to, Barbara congratulated me on raising my guild rank.

“Congratulations. Your guild rank is now at rank 2. You can now buy and sell tamed monsters.”

“All right! Finally!”

As was suggested, the guild had a secondhand market for monsters. You could sell the creatures you tamed in order to earn money, or buy monsters that were harder to obtain. It was one of *the* most widely known Tamer-specific features in the game, so I was glad that I could finally make use of it.

“Would you like to check out the list?” Barbara offered.

“Yes, please!” I responded a little too enthusiastically. I couldn’t help it; I had been *dying* to use this system.

Unfortunately, my excitement was short-lived. The monsters currently listed for sale were all incredibly weak. My limited selection might have been due to my low guild rank; the only options available to me were level-1 Fanged Rats, Gray Squirrels, and Rabbits—all tamable creatures found in Zone One. Of course, even if they were beginner monsters, they might have been stronger if they had been hatched from special eggs created through breeding, or a unique specimen like Olto, but...apparently I just wasn’t of a high enough rank to buy special monsters just yet.

“Hmm, I don’t wanna waste one of my slots on a total dud...”

Not now, I decided. At least, that was what I thought, until I found something intriguing at the bottom of the list.

“Eggs?”

“Yes. Eggs require a bit of work, so they’re slightly cheaper than buying a fully grown monster.”

Obviously. With monsters born from eggs, you had to wait for them to hatch before you could tame them.

“Still, there’s a chance of receiving a monster with higher stats.”

If two monsters of the same species reproduced, their offspring would belong to the same species and inherit both of their parents’ abilities. In those cases,

you had a slightly better chance of obtaining a unique or powerful specimen. Interbreeding, however, was where things got a bit tricky. The resulting offspring would belong to either breed, but you wouldn't know which until they were born. In some cases though, breeding certain monsters together could create an entirely new species. The point was, although buying eggs was a risky business, there was also the possibility that you could get your hands on a powerful monster. Of course, you had to be prepared to deal with potential disappointment as well.

At the moment, there were three eggs available. One of the three was a Fanged Rat egg, one a Rabbit egg. Even though the offspring of either of these two could potentially be stronger, I didn't find them very appealing. The third one, however, intrigued me. It was a cross between a Honey Bee and a Little Bear: both were native to the forests in Zone Two. I remembered them since they were part of the creatures I could obtain with Advanced Tame. Despite my current rank, it looked like I could still buy them in egg form.

"A bee and a bear? How does *that* work?"

"Eggs are created by combining the magic of monsters that are highly compatible with each other, regardless of species."

"Compatible...? Aren't bears supposed to be honey bees' natural enemies?"

"Well, they both like honey."

"Seriously?"

"Seriously."

Never mind, not gonna think too hard about that. All things considered, this egg seemed promising. Regardless of which monster I'd get, it was bound to be pretty strong. It was like choosing between a trooper and a vanguard. It cost 3,000 G, which was more than five times more expensive than the other monsters, but still, I had to have it.

"I wonder..." I muttered.

"So, what will it be?"

"Hmm. I can leave my egg here until it hatches, right?"

“Of course. We have an incubation room on the second floor for eggs. You can retrieve them once they’ve hatched. We’ll send them to the ranch if you don’t have any available slots in your party, or to your home base if you’ve set up one.”

This wasn’t something I had to worry about yet, but if your party was maxed out, the monsters you hatched would usually get sent to the ranch. I knew nothing about this ranch, though—where it was, how your tamed monsters got sent there instantly, whether it was big enough to house every single monster every Tamer sent, or who was in charge of it. In short, it was a system that allowed you to hang on to monsters that you didn’t have space for. Though it should go without saying, your monsters wouldn’t level up or grow while they were at the guild ranch; it was more or less a storage box.

However, things were a bit different if you had a home base. Depending on the size of your base, you could station a number of monsters there, which would gain you all sorts of bonuses that weren’t obtainable while they were at the ranch.

Home bases came in all shapes and sizes. If it was shaped like a house, your monsters would cook and clean for you; if it was more like a farm, your monsters would grow automatically. Actually, it was because of the bonus you could get by placing a monster with Farming skills on your farm that Olto did farm work without being told to.

“But this monster can’t farm, and also it’s from Zone Two.”

Still, this could be my only chance to obtain an egg this rare. *All right, I’ll buy it!*

“I’ll take this egg, please.”

“Very well. Would you like to keep it at the guild or buy an incubator? If you have a home base, you can set up an incubator yourself.”

“Wait, you can *buy* incubators?”

That was news to me. During the beta phase, there had been no option but to hatch your eggs at the guild. This had to be a new function.

“You can. We use the lowest-grade incubators for the incubation room. It’ll

take a while for your eggs to hatch, not to mention there are no bonuses either."

"You get bonuses from hatching eggs?"

"If you use a more advanced incubator, it'll grant your monster some bonus, such as a slight increase in initial stats or change in skills."

"Aren't I better off buying one, then?"

Hatching eggs myself seemed like a much better option.

"I would say so, yes. A few things to note, though. First, personal incubators are disposable and will disappear after one use. Eggs will also disappear unless you place them in an incubator within one week of their creation date or day of purchase."

That meant you couldn't hoard them to place in more expensive incubators later on.

"I hear you can also create incubators through Forging or Alchemy."

Interesting. I was keen on trying that out, although it'd be ages before I could, seeing as I didn't have the right recipe nor ingredients. However, the fact that they were disposable bothered me.

"How much do incubators cost?"

"Borrowing the ones at the guild is 100 G. If you're buying, the cheapest one will cost you 2,000 G, which gives one of your monster's initial stats a +1 effect selected at random."

That wasn't much of a boost. I could afford it, though. Buying one along with the egg would set me back 5,000 G, but maybe it was worth it.

"This is a list of incubators we sell. Since your guild rank is at rank 2, you can only buy the ones up to here."

There were two types of incubators available to me: the regular incubator, which cost 2,000 G, and the growth accelerator, which cost 4,000 G. The growth accelerator gave one of your monster's initial stats a +3 boost.

This wasn't even up for debate. Clearly, the growth accelerator was the way

to go. That would leave me with roughly 8,000 G, but so what?! *Heh heh heh.* Time for maximum power, baby!

It seemed easy enough to use; all I had to do was place my egg in the incubator and wait. I didn't have to leave it indoors either, as the lid would keep the egg safe.

"See you later," said Barbara, bidding me farewell.

I returned to our farm and immediately went about setting up the incubator. I selected the device from my status window, and was immediately presented with a prompt asking if I would like to place my egg in it. I chose 'Yes,' and the incubator appeared before me with the egg already inside.

"It's bigger than I thought."

Both the incubator and the egg were larger than I expected. The egg was slightly bigger than a bowling ball, and would probably take both hands to carry.

Obviously, the accelerator was even larger—about two sizes bigger than the egg it contained—and was rather futuristic in design. It was a round, egg-shaped metal capsule with a circular glass window on the front, which allowed you to see its contents.

"Mmm?" Olto eyed the device curiously.

"Oh, this? It's an egg, and an incubator!"

"Mm-mm!" Olto pressed his ear against the accelerator, listening intently.

"Can you hear anything?" I asked, doing likewise. All I heard was silence. Olto, however, continued to listen, as though he did hear something.

"Any idea what kind of monster we'll get?"

"Mm?"

Apparently not. Judging from his behavior, however, I had a feeling he would welcome this soon-to-be-born hatchling. Although I had no idea what our newest addition to the family would look like, it basically meant Olto would be getting a younger sibling. It wouldn't hurt for them to get along.

"Kinda worried about leaving it out in the open, though... Wonder if we can

move it inside the barn?”

Much to my surprise, it was lighter than I expected, and I was able to carry it with ease. I even managed to set it up in the barn without any difficulty. *Yup, this seems way safer.*

“At last, I’ve got myself a fighter!”

“Mmm!”

Now, it was simply a matter of waiting.

Chapter Five: The Lakeside Sequoia Dryad

I'd successfully completed my quests and placed the incubator in the barn. With all of my chores out of the way, I could finally concentrate on solving the mystery of the key.

"Hmm... Wish there was some kind of clue..." I muttered, examining the mysterious key I'd obtained from my litter-picking quest. "Can't use it if I don't know what it's for."

I bet there were hundreds of keyholes in the Town of Beginnings alone, never mind the game as a whole. I didn't have time to try out every single one of them. *Think: have I come across any questionable places...?*

"Wait a minute..."

There was one place that seemed suspect: the locked iron door that I discovered under the stone bridge in the East District. Could this be the key to that door? It seemed plausible; after all, I had come across both through labor quests.

"Sounds a bit too good to be true, but wouldn't hurt to try."

I decided to put my theory to the test immediately. It was already late at night, which actually worked in my favor; I'd attract less attention this way. The streets in town were lit, so as long as I had a map, I shouldn't have any problems finding my way to the door.

I hurried to the bridge, struggling to contain my excitement. Even with the streetlamps, it was still much harder to see than during the daytime. Every now and then, I would bump into someone in the dark, surprising us both.

"Phew, made it... The coast is clear, I think?"

I checked my surroundings just in case, but as far as I could see, I was the only person there—though I couldn't be entirely certain without Night Vision. I crept stealthily into the canal and ducked under the bridge, careful not to make a splash. Not wanting to attract unnecessary attention, I had left Olto behind.

“Can’t see a thing at night. Should be somewhere around here, though.”

It was completely dark under the bridge. I groped in the darkness for the keyhole and inserted the key, but it didn’t seem to fit, as it rattled and refused to turn.

“Wrong hole?”

I kept on trying; after several tries, the key unexpectedly fit into the lock. There was a click, and it turned smoothly all the way through.

“N-No way. It’s actually open.”

I stood gaping at the door as it creaked open slowly.

“C-Can I go in?” I wondered aloud, despite there being no one to answer me.

The door revealed a descending stairway, dimly lit by torch-like objects hanging on the wall.

“Hmm. Maybe I shouldn’t have come at night.”

Through the wavering torchlight, I could make out the faint outline of the stone staircase. A musty smell tickled my nostrils, the iron door emitting a high-pitched squeal at the touch of my hand.

“...This is hella creepy.”

It looked like bats or rats would jump out at any moment.

“St-Stop being a scaredy-cat. This is just a game. It’s all fake, same as a haunted house.”

Just in case, I set all of the medicine I had to Quick Access. If I ran into any monsters, you could bet I’d be out of there in a flash, unless they were strong enough to kill me with one blow.

“Off I go,” I said, gingerly taking my first step. The only sounds in the narrow stairway were those of my shoes clacking against the stone. After thirty steps or so, I came upon a small room, leading to another passage.

“There’s more...?”

I couldn’t help feeling discouraged, and regretted not bringing Olto with me.

Don't be scared, don't be scared, I told myself, treading even more carefully than before.

Several minutes later, I arrived at a fork in the road.

"Which way should I go...?"

I decided to go left. I didn't have any particular reason other than that I'd somehow remembered Fleming's left-hand rule for motors, so going left seemed like a good idea.

To my surprise, the path on the left led down to another stairway. There were no torches this time, and I was unable to see anything.

"There's *got* to be a monster down here... Better turn back."

Rather than head down the stairs and risk a potential threat, I figured I should check out the other side first.

I returned to the point where the paths diverged and went right this time. After walking down a hallway that gave me a vibe of ancient ruins, I found myself in front of a large stone doorway.

Unlike the austere iron door at the entrance, this stone surface of these doors had elaborate and magnificent engravings of plants. A gigantic tree with branches outstretched to the sky with various plants surrounding it was carved across the double doors. Despite the colorless, cold hard stone they were made of, the carvings felt almost alive. Clearly, this door held some importance.

"It looks heavy, though. Will it open?" I wondered. After all, you'd be hard-pressed to find a player as weak as me.

I needn't have worried, however, as the doors swung easily open with a push.

"Well, that was easy..."

Before entering, I took a peek inside.

"Seriously, this better not be a boss room."

The door revealed a peculiar room. The first thing I noticed was something large and brown covering the walls.

"What are *those*?"

At first, I couldn’t tell what the material was, but upon closer inspection, I discovered they were giant tree roots. Each root was about as thick as a barrel and entwined with others, covering about half of the room and surrounding a raised altar-like stone platform. I could almost taste the event I was about to trigger.

What should I do? Should I go back? I wondered. But I *had* come all the way here...

“Okay, here goes nothing!”

I gingerly stepped inside the room and crept towards the altar.

“...Nothing’s happening,” I said, taken aback. Was there really nothing to the altar? It seemed too conspicuous for there not to be.

“...These giant roots gotta be from the Lakeside Sequoia above,” I muttered. Just then, I heard a woman’s voice drift through the air.

“That’s right.”

“Whoa! Wh-Where’d that come from?!”

I jumped back a few steps and glanced around the room in surprise.

“Right here, adventurer.”

The voice belonged to a beautiful emerald-haired woman who had emerged from the altar, bathed in light, an air of mystery hanging all around her...



I stared in amazement at the strange woman who had suddenly materialized before my eyes. Her smile bore no malice—the very sight of it made me feel warm and fuzzy inside.

“Who are you?” I asked.

“I am the Sequoia Dryad,” the spirit replied.

Now that she mentioned it, I recalled that the Lakeside Sequoia was supposedly sacred. That would mean that this person (?) had to be the spirit that lived in this tree.

The dryad wore a loose, pale green outfit with a peculiar sheen to it. The sheer look of the fabric was rather suggestive, but her kind and gentle aura prevented it from becoming obscene. I couldn’t hold back my excitement; I had to take a screenshot. *I mean, come on—we’re talking about a dryad here.* This was every fantasy lover’s dream. Couldn’t forget to take a video either; I needed to immortalize this wondrous moment on film. From what I’d heard, NPCs couldn’t tell if you were filming them or not. My sources appeared to be correct, as the dryad showed no signs of having noticed.

“Uh, sorry for trespassing.”

“No need to apologize,” said the dryad. “In the past, people used to come here and make offerings all the time.”

“Really? Cool.”

“In exchange, I bestowed blessings and comfort upon my worshippers. We had a long, mutually dependent relationship,” the dryad reminisced fondly. However, her expression soon turned to one of sadness. “Unfortunately, some impudent fools attempted to harm me, so I asked the Adventurers’ Guild Master to seal the entrance, henceforth restricting who could enter.”

“Huh? Then how come *I* could get in?”

“Only those who obtain the key and find their way here through their own efforts are allowed entry. The key prevents those with evil intentions from so much as touching it.”

“Wow. Didn’t know it was that impressive...”

Who knew this dirty antique key was such a powerful magical item?

“This key was created with magic, as was the door.”

“Erm, so if I understand correctly, you’ll bless me if I make an offering, right?”

“Yes. Though the type of blessing you’ll get will depend on what you offer me.”

Damn, what I wouldn’t give for a blessing! However, I didn’t have any noteworthy items—at least, nothing that seemed fit for a dryad’s altar.

“By the way, can I make offerings any day of the week?” I inquired.

“I am only able to descend once a week on ‘Tree Day,’” the dryad answered.

I see. Made sense since she was a tree spirit.

Incidentally, there were seven days a week in this world, just as in real life. As in Japan, some days of the week were named after the Chinese zodiac elements, namely fire, water, wood, metal, and earth. As January 1st had been ‘Sun Day,’ today’s date—January 5th—was Thursday, named in Japanese for wood, which meant it was ‘Tree Day.’

Wow, talk about a stroke of luck. Just in time too. The day would be rolling over in less than an hour.

“Also, bear in mind that once I give you your blessing, you will not be able to receive another for at least eight weeks.”

“Gotcha.”

It looked like I’d have to scrap the idea of experimenting with a random joke item. If I missed this chance, however, I’d have to wait a whole week until the spirit descended again. I didn’t have time to go back and find something more appropriate.

“C’mon, there’s gotta be *something*...”

What were the criteria of a good offering, anyway? Price? Rarity? Rank? What sort of gift would make a tree nymph happy in the first place? After pondering the question for a while, it suddenly hit me: *What about the premium fertilizer I bought earlier?* It might not be worth much in the game as a whole, but perhaps

a dryad would appreciate it. I decided to take my chances, and offered a bag.

“Er, how about this...?”

How dare you give me such garbage? I imagined her yelling at me. My heart was in my mouth as I awaited her response. After all, I was as good as handing a deity a filthy sack of dirt.

As I gingerly placed the item on the altar, the dryad smiled at me again.

“This is a wonderful gift. I appreciate your thoughtfulness. Allow me to bestow a blessing upon you as a token of gratitude. Since you’re the first visitor I’ve had in a long time, I shall be sure to reward you handsomely. Take this,” the spirit instructed as she placed her palms above me and began concentrating. “Here,” she urged.

“Huh? What?”

“Hold out your hands.”

“G-Got it.”

I put my palms together and obediently held them out before her.

“May the gods bless you.”

“Whoa!”

A blinding light shot out from the tree nymph’s palms. I closed my eyes, shielding them against the light, when all of a sudden, something touched my palms. I warily opened my eyes to find myself holding a fruit the color of cherry blossoms. I hadn’t been expecting this sort of boon. I’d been hoping to get a new skill, boost in stats, or even a title if I was lucky. Though crestfallen, I held up the fruit that the spirit had bestowed upon me and assessed it.

Name: Lakeside Sequoia Fruit

Rarity: 8 / Quality: 10★

Effect: Fully recovers hunger status when ingested. Also boosts user’s resistance to status ailments for one hour. (5-minute cooldown)

“Wh-Wh-What the hell?!”

A rarity of eight?! That was insane! The items you could currently find only had a rarity of four at the most. How the heck was this an *eight*?!

“M-Miss Drya—”

“I wish you the best of luck.”

“Hey, wait...!”

Before I could ask anything, the Sequoia Dryad vanished, a look of satisfaction on her face.

“*The Lakeside Sequoia Dryad’s Altar has been unlocked under special circumstances. The first player to achieve this feat will be awarded the title, ‘The Dryad’s Blessing.’*”

The server-wide announcement was immediately followed by an individual one.

“*As a bonus, you will also be receiving some fire, water, earth, and wind crystals.*”

Nice. I had managed to get another title, and a unique one at that. I even got some probably rare items! *Thanks, O mighty spirit!* I could only assume that this was a pretty big deal too, considering the server-wide announcement.

Title: The Dryad’s Blessing

Effect: You have gained 5,000 G and four bonus points. Increases damage towards and lessens damage received from tree-type and spirit-type monsters during battle.

Was it just me, or was this title pretty powerful? While it only worked on certain opponents, I might actually have a shot at fighting with this.

“Think I’ll give this to Olto.”

Man, if I could grow the Lakeside Sequoia fruit on our farm I might end up

filthy rich... My head spun at the possibility. I figured I better ask Alyssa for more information before I gave it to Olto, though.

“Wonder how much it’ll fetch. Its rarity is eight, so it can’t be worth less than a sack of 2,000 G premium fertilizer, can it?”

I checked my friends list, hoping Alyssa was still around, but unfortunately, she seemed to be offline at the moment. Ah well, c’est la vie. I’d have to visit her shop tomorrow.

“Speaking of, it’s about time I log out too...”

I decided to return to the farm for the time being. I crawled quietly out from under the bridge, hurrying back.

“I’m home!”

“Mm-mm,” Olto greeted me upon my return. I patted him on the head as I pulled out the fruit I’d just obtained.

“Ta-da! Check this out, Olto!”

“Mm? Mm-mm!”

Wow, he must have jumped about five feet in the air. Either this item was incredibly rare, or Olto was trying to humor me.

“Mm! Mmm!”

Olto waved his arms and jumped up and down. It seemed like he wanted a closer look.

“Here you go,” I said, handing him the Lakeside Sequoia fruit.

“Mm!” Olto stared at it intently, eyes sparkling with excitement.

After ten seconds or so, he tugged on my robe, seemingly confused.

“Mm?”

“What’s up, buddy?”

Olto pointed at our farm, then back again at the fruit.

“Are you asking me why I’m not propagating it?”

“Mm!”

“What do you think? Should I plant it?”

“Mm!” Olto nodded vigorously. Apparently, he wanted to plant it on our farm.

I felt torn. I mean, how often did you come across such a rare and valuable item?

“This is really rare, you know. Think you can grow it?”

“Mm,” Olto answered in the affirmative, thumping his chest confidently. Sensing my hesitation, he let out a whine. “Mm...”

“Don’t look at me like that...”

“Mm, mm.”

This time, he clung to my leg and stared up at me imploringly. Dang it, how could I possibly resist that face?

“Mm!”

“...Okay okay, you win,” I sighed.

He really knew how to wrap me around his little finger. Anyway, it would be huge if we could grow and harvest the fruit on our farm.

“All right, Olto! I’ll leave it to you!”

“Mmm!”

He then proceeded to propagate the Lakeside Sequoia fruit. Despite the high rarity, the process wasn’t any different from propagating the peach. Even the sapling, which he planted next to the young green peach tree, looked almost identical.

“Hope it grows nice and tall!” I exclaimed hopefully, clapping my hands in prayer.

“Mm-mm!” Olto said, mimicking my movements.

“Right, guess I’ll log out now. Still, would be nice if Alyssa... Oh hey, she’s back on.”

Since I had information both to sell and buy, I figured I would head out,

although I wasn't sure if her shop would be open at this hour. I needn't have worried, though, as Alyssa's store was up and running, even at night. She truly was a shining example of a merchant. I seemed to have caught her at a busy moment, however, as she was in the middle of concocting something greenish when I arrived.

"Good evening," I called out.

"Welcome. Gimme a sec, will you?" she replied, not taking her eyes off her concoction. I didn't fault her for this, as any mistakes would result in a downgrade in quality. "Mind if I keep working?"

"Sure, as long as you're okay to talk."

"All right then. So, what brings you here? Do you come bearing some more exciting news?"

"Well, sort of... Anyway, check this out," I said, showing Alyssa the screenshot of the Lakeside Sequoia fruit I had taken earlier.

"Oho."

Although she had merely glanced at it, she seemed to know what it was.

"How'd you get that? It's not supposed to be in season right now."

"Not in season? So is it easy to get when it *is* in season?"

"The Lakeside Sequoia bears fruit every April. Apparently, NPCs harvest them, and for a short time during that month, you can buy an item called 'Ripe Lakeside Tree Fruit' from their shops. I've seen them before, since it was around March or April in-game when we had the beta test. I think they sold for 3,000 G apiece."

"That means you can buy this fruit when it's in season for a fairly reasonable price, right?"

"I'd say so, yeah."

"Then I guess this ain't all it's cracked up to be."

What a letdown. *I'll take premium fertilizer over some stupid fruit anytime*, I grumbled inwardly. I had totally expected it to be something amazing, but it

turned out it only had a high rating since it was a limited item.

“I expected way more from something with a rarity of eight...”

“Huh? What did you just say?”

“I said, it had a rarity of eight, so—”

“H-Hold up!”

Alyssa paused in the middle of mixing and gaped at me. I glanced at her mortar with concern, which was emitting a cloud of strange smoke. Ignoring it completely, she sprang to her feet and was by my side in no time.

“Sorry! I was wrong! C-Can I take another look at it?”

“S-Sure.”

I showed her a screenshot of the fruit’s appraisal results, and she stared at it, wide-eyed. As always, her eyes reminded me of a cat’s.

“Holy shit... This isn’t a lakeside tree fruit, but a Lakeside Sequoia fruit? And a rarity of eight at that... Wh-Where on earth did you get it?!”

“Well, I got it from the dryad enshrined in the underground altar.”

“Tell me more!”

It seemed like Alyssa didn’t know about the altar. Like the announcement hinted at earlier, I appeared to be the only one who’d managed to find it so far. It wasn’t as if it were impossible to find, though. The door was visible as long as you went under the bridge, and you could easily obtain the key, too, as long as you accepted the litter-picking quest.

Alyssa looked genuinely flabbergasted as I recounted my journey and showed her the conversation log between me and the dryad.

“That altar can only be entered on the first Thursday of April via the Adventurers’ Guild basement. On top of that, we don’t exactly know who’s allowed entry. Those who meet all the requirements will be granted a skill called ‘The Dryad’s Invitation’ for that day. Apparently, only players who possess that skill can enter the altar.”

That sounded extremely vague. I now knew, however, that being able to visit

the place any time was a pretty big deal.

“Am I the first person to find the door?”

“I think so. First your Thou Shalt Not Kill title, and now this. I’m impressed. You must be blessed by the gaming gods.”

“I doubt it.”

If I really were blessed by the gods of this game, I’d be on the frontlines fighting S-ranked monsters about now.

“What are you going to do with that fruit?”

“Huh? Well actually, I’ve already propagated it and planted it on my farm.”

“Propagated it? Oh right, your gnome. Did you like, use up all your bonus points on him?”

Come to think of it, although I’d mentioned my tamed monster was a gnome, I hadn’t shown her Olto’s data yet.

“Here. These are his stats.”

“Let’s see. What the hell?! You’re joking! Not just Arboriculture, but an EX skill too?! Already?”

A look of astonishment spread across her face. She looked as shocked as she had when she first saw the data on the Lakeside Sequoia fruit.

“I did use all of my initial bonus points on him.”

“No wonder your potions are so high quality. Looks like you hit the jackpot with your gnome. Wasn’t expecting him to have an EX skill from the get-go.”

Olto’s abilities were apparently way more impressive than I thought. Hearing her praise him made me happier than actually receiving a compliment myself.

Having gotten over her shock, Alyssa now turned to me with a serious expression.

“Probably best if you keep his EX skill a secret, though,” she said.

“Oh? You think so?”

“Mhm. Some players might get jealous, and you don’t want to make waves

unnecessarily, do you?”

The incident of being chased by dozens of players was still fresh in my mind. I didn’t want to attract any more unwanted attention, so I decided to heed Alyssa’s advice.

“Got it. My lips are sealed.”

“I have to say though, it’s just like you to propagate such a valuable item without a second thought.”

Oops. Should I have sold it instead?

“How much would it have fetched, by the way?”

“Good question... To be honest, I can’t really put a price tag on that at the moment. It’s too rare.”

“Really? That rare?”

“You kidding me? Of course. I *could* try to come up with a price for it, but... It would most likely be way beyond anything I could afford. If I’m being honest, I don’t think anyone can afford it at this stage in the game.”

So there *was* such a thing as being *too* rare. It was likely similar to one of those inestimable, national treasure-worthy vases you see on TV sometimes. You probably couldn’t even calculate a standard price for it.

I might have really jumped the gun this time. How could I possibly resist Olto’s puppy-eyes, though? I was more determined than ever now to take good care of the sapling.

“Seriously, though, all this excitement is bad for my heart. If this wasn’t a game, I might’ve had a real heart attack.”

“You’re being overdramatic.”

“Easy for you to say... Don’t give me that vapid look.”

Dang, and here I thought my avatar was supposed to be pretty handsome. Was I that obvious?

“You’re selling me this info, right?” she asked.

“Well, duh, I already told you everything.”

I didn’t see her point in asking after she had already heard all the details. However, I seemed to have misunderstood her.

“As part of our policy, we don’t sell information that we haven’t paid a fair price for. If you’re not keen on selling, I’ll keep this news to myself for a while,” Alyssa explained.

I guessed information dealers had their own set of morals. While that was good to know, it wasn’t something I was concerned about at this point.

“I’ll sell. That’s what I came here for anyway.”

“There are a few things I’d like to confirm. Mind taking me to the altar with you next Tree Day?”

“No problem.”

“In that case, how about I pay you 1,000 G up-front? Minimum 4,000 G if you take me to the altar.”

“What do you mean by minimum?”

Did that mean she was willing to pay more, depending on the circumstances?

“From what I could tell from your and the dryad’s convo log, I’m guessing the Lakeside Sequoia fruit was a special exclusive item you got for being the first player to make an offering.”

“Hmm, you do have a point.”

The dryad did say she was going to reward me handsomely.

“It really depends on what sort of items you can get from the altar,” Alyssa continued. “If other players like myself can also obtain a Lakeside Sequoia fruit with a rarity of eight, then I daresay this information’s worth at least a hundred thousand, perhaps even more. It all comes down to what I can confirm.”

So that’s what she meant.

“Gotcha. That’s fine by me,” I replied.

“Guess we have ourselves a deal then. This might not have anything to do with clearing the game, but it sounds like an interesting event. If it turns out that other people can visit the altar too, there’ll probably be an uproar.”

That was certainly a possibility. If I was in their shoes, I'd probably want to go too, even if it meant forking out a small fortune. *I mean, a mysterious altar where a beautiful tree nymph resides? Who wouldn't want to see that?*

"I also have this," I said, showing her the video I took to back up my claims.

"That a video of the dryad?"

"Yeah. I filmed her just in case."

"Wow..." Alyssa sighed. "Are you going to post it online?"

"Dunno. To be honest, I'm more of a lurker than a poster..."

I'd heard countless stories of people not uploading these types of videos or posting things they discovered online, only to get bashed for withholding information. All things considered, it was probably in my best interest to make the video public, but...I'd never posted anything in an online forum before. Even posting in the in-game forum used exclusively by LJO players seemed like a huge step. Like I said, I was a dyed-in-the-wool lurker.

"In that case, why don't you give it to me? I can post it for you on the Quick-Eared Cats' website."

"You will?"

"Yep. After all, one of our objectives is to gather any info that's been kept secret and share it with the general public. Not all players withhold information for selfish reasons; some, like you, simply can't be bothered or aren't used to posting in forums."

Basically, the process went something like this:

Step 1: Bring whatever news you want to sell to the Quick-Eared Cats.

Step 2: The Quick-Eared Cats buy your information.

Step 3: The Quick-Eared Cats publicize the information you sold them.

Step 4: Sit back and relax now that you're freed from the hassle of having to share it yourself.

I had to admit, that was pretty convenient.

“I’ll leave it to you then.”

“Good. I’ll pay you 1,000 G for the video.”

“What? But you already paid me a thousand for the altar info.”

“It wouldn’t sit right with me to accept such a spectacular video for free. Besides, it’ll be great PR for our website.”

I supposed people who wanted to watch this video were likely to check out the Quick-Eared Cats’ website as well, so perhaps she had a point there. What a stroke of luck; I hadn’t been expecting to get any money for this information.

“Okay, if you insist.”

“That’s settled then. I’d like to know more about your title too. What was it called again? ‘The Dryad’s Blessing?’ Gimme the skinny.”

“Sure, I don’t mind.”

“Thank you! I’ll throw in another thousand.”

“Thanks. That’s not all, though... Why’re you looking at me like that?”

For some reason, Alyssa was giving me a reproachful stare.

“Just thinking about how nothing can possibly faze me anymore. What is it?”

“Do you know what these are?” I asked, showing her the elemental crystals I had obtained as a reward for my title. “Depending on what you can tell me about them, I’d like to buy that info.”

At the sight of them, Alyssa’s eyes widened in surprise. Wait, didn’t she just say nothing was going to shock her anymore?

“Those are attribute crystals! H-How did you get them?!”

“I got them as a reward for uncovering the altar.”

“Th-This is a huge deal, you know? They’re incredibly rare, even in Zone Three, and hardly anyone found them during the beta phase. I knew that you could get earth crystals from gnomes’ rare drops, but I’ve never seen the others.”

So these *are the ultra-rare, one-in-a-million chance items!*

"Do you intend on selling these? I'll pay you 30,000 G per crystal."

"Huh? You're kidding, right?"

"Dead serious."

"*What?!*"

That would mean a whopping *120,000 G* if I sold them all. If I had that kind of money, I could do anything.

Not so fast, Yuto, calm down. If these items were that rare, there had to be other ways I could use them. Selling was easy enough: I could do that anytime. *Better hold on to them for now rather than make rash decisions.*

"Nah, I think I'll hold on to them for the time being."

"Too bad. If you do change your mind, though, you know where to come."

Alyssa didn't look that disappointed, however; she'd probably expected me to turn down her offer. Still, it was just like her to leave the door open.

"Of course, will do. How much do I owe you for the info on crystals?"

"Nothing. I've made quite a bit of money with your Thou Shalt Not Kill title, anyway."

"Huh? You're already selling info on that title? I thought you weren't done verifying all the details yet."

"That's true, but it'll take four days until I have all the results. That's far too late. Most people will have made too much progress to redo their character build by then."

That made sense. I'd obtained the zero-kills title on my fourth day in the game, so naturally, it'd take another four days to verify the facts. Eight days was more than enough time to make a fair amount of progress, which meant fewer players would opt to rebuild their character.

"Don't worry, I make sure to add a little disclaimer when I sell it. I request 1,000 G up front, plus another 3,000 G if the player successfully obtains the title."

“But how can you tell who’s who if they redo their character and create a new avatar?”

“Their ID remains the same even if their avatar changes. No one gets away without paying me... Mwa ha ha,” Alyssa chuckled. I silently vowed to never get on her bad side.

The day after my chance encounter with the Sequoia Dryad, I logged in to the game as usual and hurried to our farm.

In-game, the weather changed daily; it hadn’t been this sunny since the first day. Walking at a brisk pace, I looked up at the cloudless blue sky. Just then, I caught a glimpse of the Lakeside Sequoia in the east.

“...Hope my lakeside tree grows nice and tall too.”

Wait a second. It wasn’t going to grow *that* big, was it? I wouldn’t have enough space if it did, even if I bought all of the land in this area.

“Wh-Whatever, we’ll cross that bridge when we get to it.”

I arrived at our farm slightly nervous and extremely hopeful about the future of our Lakeside Sequoia sapling.

“Morning, Olto.”

“Mm-mm!”

The first thing I noticed was a red, poisonous-looking mushroom sprouting from the mushroom log I set up the day before.

“Cool, looks like the red panther cap’s ready for harvest. There’s only one of them, though. Hey, Olto. Do we have to propagate this mushroom again in order to grow more?”

That would be a huge hassle if that were the case. However, Olto shook his head. It looked like the spores could be harvested a few times once you sprinkled them on the log. I guessed I’d just have to be patient.

I immediately got cracking on the tasks that had now become part of my daily routine: sowing seeds and crafting items. We also managed to harvest all-new crops—blue carrots, amber pumpkins, and the wild strawberries that I was

asked to grow. Since each strawberry plant yielded one to three strawberries, I could technically complete my quest today if I wanted to. However, I decided not to deliver them yet, and grow some more to keep for myself.

From past experience, spinach had been a total letdown, but what about the blue carrots and amber pumpkins we harvested today? At the moment, my options were to either mix them into food rations or toss them together to make a salad. I supposed I could also deliver them to the guild. Hang on, I could probably complete a few Farming Guild quests now.

“Guess I’ll go to the Farming Guild today.”

As I was planning on selling Alyssa some of the things I made, I decided to stop by the guild as well. *Might as well check out the other stalls too*.

To tell the truth, I had been considering raising my Alchemy level. In the beginning, you could only perform Fuse with your Alchemy skill. This basically allowed you to take two items and turn them into one, which was a lot more complicated than it sounded.

First of all, Fuse only worked with specific combinations. Wrong combinations resulted in failure, and the ingredients you used would disappear. While you could improve an item’s quality by fusing two of the same thing, you’d need an awful lot of items to raise the quality significantly. The forums said that in order to raise your Alchemy level, it was best to buy a shit ton of poison hemlock and paralyzing plants and fuse as many as possible. *Bring it on!*

As always, the Farming Guild receptionist was an old man NPC. I felt sorry for all the Farmers out there.

“Here’s your reward, sonny.”

“Thanks.”

I had managed to complete a few quests at the Farming Guild. Although it wasn’t enough to level up, it was still important to increase my contribution points bit by bit and raise my guild rank, so that I’d be able to buy more seeds and seedlings. As the saying goes, success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out.

I also asked the old man about weeds, but apparently,they weren’t

considered real crops. Even encyclopedias listed them in the miscellaneous category.

“Right, let’s go shopping for ingredients next. First stop, Alyssa’s place.”

While she was well-known as an information broker, her shop wasn’t called an Everything Store for nothing. My plans changed abruptly when I stumbled upon an interesting stall on the way. Intrigued, I came to a halt in front of it.

“Is this a recipe?” I asked the shop owner, indicating a scroll. An array of unusual items were on display.

“Welcome to Sawyer’s Alchemy Shop!” he greeted. “You have good taste, mister. The ones down there are recipe scrolls for medicine.”

The shopkeeper was a young, blue-haired boy elf, roughly junior high school age in appearance. Considering how elves weren’t a race that drastically altered your real world appearance on selection, he had to be quite young in real life. That, or he was some kind of weirdo who’d opted for a childish look for other reasons.

Well, it *was* the summer holidays. It wouldn’t be surprising if students were playing too. His long elf ears were incredibly fitting for an RPG; just looking at them got me pumped.

“Crusher? Instant Killer? Sounds intimidating.”

Setting those aside, was there any point in creating recipe scrolls for things like potions, medicine, food rations, hunter potions, poison, and paralyzing potions? These were beginner recipes you could automatically obtain by learning skills.

“What’s the point of writing *those* recipes down? I doubt many people will buy them.”

“You’re right, they don’t. I only made them so I could level up my Alchemy and Writing skills. I’d be lucky if I can sell even one.”

“Writing skill?”

Never heard that one before. Obviously, I didn’t know every single skill in the game, but a writing skill? What did *that* do? From the looks of it, it seemed like

you could make recipe scrolls, but I had assumed he'd made them with some kind of Alchemy art that I hadn't learned yet.

"It's a skill that allows you to write all sorts of things. At the moment, I can only create scrolls using paper I made with my Alchemy skill, but I figure I'll be able to create spell books and grimoires eventually. My dream is to make a grimoire in this game...the kind I saw in a cartoon I watched when I was little," he added sheepishly.

"I see."

There really were all kinds of people in LJO. I didn't know what spellbooks or grimoires did, but they sure sounded fascinating. *Hope your dream comes true, buddy*.

"That's why I selected skills that I thought might come in handy—Writing, Alchemy, Concoct, Magic Circles, and Leather."

"The first four make sense, but why Leather?"

"In the olden days, books used to be bound in leather, right?"

"Ah, right."

His level of dedication was impressive. I sincerely hoped he'd reach his goals one day.

"Do let me know if you come across any useful tips."

The hopeful look on Sawyer's face reminded me so much of Olto; I supposed the innocent, boyish air they both had contributed to it too.

"Will do."

"Thank you. Are you an Alchemist or Apothecary? Since you know about beginners' recipes and stuff."

"Nope. Just obtained Concoct and Alchemy skills, that's all. You wouldn't happen to have any poison hemlock or paralyzing plants, would you...? I need them for leveling up."

"Sorry. I tend to use up my ingredients, so I don't have enough left over to sell."

A pity, but that was to be expected; he was an Alchemist, after all.

I then purchased the recipes for crushers and instant killers, and Sawyer gave me one of the extra crusher plants he had, despite it not being for sale. I was extremely grateful.

In order to create an instant killer, you needed four types of ingredients—poisonous, paralyzing, bleeding, and crushing. Thanks to Sawyer, I now had all four of them. Instant killers were a lethal potion that, when sprinkled on weapons, had a slight probability of killing your enemy with one blow for a certain duration. This was a great recipe to have, as it might actually give me a chance in a fight.

Crushers required three crusher plants to make. “Crushing”—i.e., dealing a heavy blow—was a special kind of status ailment that increased the amount of damage you dealt on your next attack. Although similar to Bleeding, the amount of damage the target took in one turn—while healable—was greater. Depending on how I used it, this could be highly effective in battle too. I made a mental note to grow and increase my supply of crusher plants soon.

“Hmm, what else...? Oh yeah, you don’t have any incubators, do you?” I asked hopefully. I had heard you could create them with Alchemy, but...

“Incubators? Sorry, I don’t.”

“Aw, too bad.”

“I’ll let you know once I’m able to make them, though!”

“Thanks, that’d be great. I’ll buy the recipe if you have one.”

“I know, why don’t we exchange friend codes then? We can swap info too. I don’t have many crafter-type friends yet...”

“I’m not actually a crafter, you know?” I said, despite having a higher Concoct skill than anything. Not very convincing.

“But you’re passionate enough about making things to buy recipes. Come ooon, please?”

The sly devil! A shiver ran down my spine as Sawyer’s innocent puppy-dog eyes locked on mine, and I found myself nodding.

“Sure, I’d love to.”

I could use a crafter-type friend or two. I didn’t sense any malice from Sawyer, and his grimoire project intrigued me. If I found anything useful, I’d be sure to let him know.

“All right, I’ll be going now,” I said.

“Okay. See you soon,” he replied, flashing me a brilliant smile as he waved me goodbye. Jeez, better keep away from anyone who seems a little too interested in little boys, buddy...

Unable to obtain the ingredients I wanted for leveling up at Sawyer’s shop, I decided to try my luck at Alyssa’s stall next.

“Hi, Alyssa,” I greeted her.

“Why, hello,” she replied.

First, I sold her the medicine and potions I’d made earlier that morning. I then used my earnings to purchase some water pumice, which turned out to be a lot cheaper than I’d thought. Thinking about it, it *was* an item you could find alongside the Western Forest’s riverbank, which was a place that most players could visit easily even if it was a suicide mission for me. I supposed it couldn’t really be *all* that rare of an item. That said, I was still floored at the discount she was giving me.

“People are *obsessed* with that video. The phone’s been ringing off the hook!” she crowed.

“That something to gloat about?”

“As an information broker, it can’t get any better than this.”

Apparently, *that* was the reason for the extra generous discount.

“Anyway, things should start calming down soon. I’ve been letting everyone know that we’re currently investigating the situation.”

“Hope so.”

After that, I bought some honey for Olto, along with thirty poison hemlock and paralyzing plants each, before leaving Alyssa’s store. *Time to get crafting,*

baby! Upon returning to our farm, I handed Olto the plants I got from Sawyer's shop. While he handled the farming, it was time for me to get cracking on some crafting!

"What should I start with...? Maybe I'll try making some food. I've never made a salad before."

Making a salad was ridiculously easy. All I had to do was chop the vegetables and infuse the cutting board with magic, and I was done. The next instant, the vegetables that had been strewn across the board were arranged neatly inside a wooden bowl. It didn't get any easier than this.

"Can you *really* call this cooking? This is like playing house..." I muttered dubiously.

Proper cooking or not, the salad turned out to be highly useful; it was effective for recovering your MP, which was a godsend, since mana potions weren't available in the Town of Beginnings yet.

After making a few more vegetable dishes, it was finally time for the process I'd been looking forward to the most, alchemy. I took out a brewing stand and placed it atop the table in the barn. It appeared as little more than a large, round serving tray, but it was a necessary item for conducting alchemical experiments.

"Okay, place two poison hemlock on the tray..."

Using the brewing stand was easy enough. I simply had to put the ingredients I wanted to synthesize on the tray, place my hand on the jewel-like object in the corner, and infuse it with magic.

I uttered the command "Fuse!" and used up one MP. The brewing stand glowed, and the two plants were fused together. While the result didn't look any different from regular poison hemlock, the difference was apparent once I assessed it.

"Yep, now it has a two-star rating."

I proceeded to fuse another pair of one-star poison hemlock into a two-star, and then continued fusing the rest of the plants in the same fashion. By the time I was done, the thirty plants had transformed into fifteen two-star poison

hemlock, and my Alchemy level had increased to level 3. My base level and job level had also increased by one each, to level 5. So it was true that crafting items gained you XP.

"All right, so far, so good."

Now to repeat the process with the two-stars. As with the first batch, I placed the plants on the brewing stand and infused them with magic. The tray glowed again, signaling that the process was complete. However, the quality of the poison hemlock on the stand remained the same. According to the forums, when fusing items of the same variety, it was necessary to add an item quantity equivalent to the square of that item's current rating to the base item, in order to raise its quality. That meant that in order to improve this two-star item to three stars, I needed to add three more two-star poison hemlock. While my Appraisal skill couldn't confirm the results, I was sure that the backend records would show the item being a fusion of two-star poison hemlock.

Fusing items with different ratings got even more complicated, so reading the forums didn't do me much good there. Beats me why the Analysts' Clan was so hell-bent on decoding that sort of stuff by themselves.

I continued fusing more items, and true to my calculations, I had produced a three-star poison hemlock by the time I'd fused in the fourth plant. Halfway through, I ate a salad in order to recover my almost depleted MP, finally turning fifteen two-star poison hemlock into three three-star specimens. Thank goodness I'd made that salad.

"Nice, all the way up to Alchemy level 7. Time to move on to the paralyzing plants."

I single-mindedly fused item after item, briefly logging out at certain intervals. It was a lot of effort, but by the end of it, my Alchemy level had crossed the double-digit mark. I had never expected my Alchemy level to reach level 10 before my Monster Taming skill did. While I was making small daily improvements to them, my Monster Taming skill and Command ability were still at levels 6 and 4, respectively.

"What kind of Tamer am I...?"

I checked the new Alchemy skill that I had just obtained, starting to doubt my

job class selection.

“I got a new art, just like the forums said. Drying, eh?”

I hadn’t imagined that you would need an Alchemy art just to dehydrate items. Turned out it wasn’t as simple as leaving things out to dry. I was still shocked that my little experiment with drying had ended in failure.

No, that wasn’t entirely right. It was important to come up with my own ideas and pursue various avenues. A true gamer should first experiment before consulting other sources. After all, it would be boring if you researched everything in advance, wouldn’t it?

Then why even bother with forums? Why not do everything yourself, you say? *Come on, give me a break.* Knowing everything might take the fun out of things, but not knowing anything at all was equally tough.

“Mm-mm?” Olto murmured curiously.

“My bad. No need to worry, Olto. Just having a little internal conflict, that’s all,” I reassured him.

Perhaps I could put my new Alchemy skill to use. Since I had planned on making some honey dumplings for Olto anyway, I tried drying the edible grass that was to be the base for them.

“Here goes... Dry!”

The effect was incredibly lackluster: the grass emitted a faint glow, and that was it. Regardless, my assessment told me that the clump had indeed transformed into dried edible grass.

“That means, if I mix this with honey...”

I ended up with a fairly high-quality, six-star honey dumpling. The experiment was a success. I wasn’t sure if the quality really mattered, though. After all, this was for Olto, and hunger status wasn’t an issue for him. Still, it wasn’t a bad idea to aim for higher-quality items, as it meant more XP and leveling up my skills faster.

Now that I had increased my skill level and unlocked several recipes, I had accomplished what I’d set out to do and then some.

“Hmm, what next?” I wondered. My Alchemy, Cooking, and Concoct skills had all reached level 10. The next thing I wanted to level up was my Farming skill, as that would unlock an art known as Selective Breeding at level 10. Selective breeding made it possible to create new types of crops by combining different crops and materials. Although the success rate was said to be quite low, I figured it was worth experimenting with.

“Might as well go find another weeding quest.”

That would allow me to level up my Farming skill and grant me a reward.

Online Forum [What’s New?] A Discussion Thread for Stuff That’s Been Newly Added to the Official Version

Don’t try to pass off unverified information as facts.

State the source of your information as clearly as possible.

Be courteous to one another.

116: Sakkyun

Is it true that there’s a mysterious spring in the Humming Forest at the end of the Eastern Plains? I used to go there a lot when I was a beta player, but I don’t remember there being one.

117: Shiro

Seems like it. Haven’t heard of any events or the like happening, though.

118: Sukegawa

There was a rumor that you could catch rare fish, so a player with Fishing skills apparently camped out at the spring for a whole day. The results were pitiful, though.

According to them, the fish weren’t that different from the ones you can find in the lake in the Town of Beginnings. If anything, they reeled in loads of trash

fish.

I'd say you're better off just fishing here.

119: Sakkyun

But there's gotta be *something*, right...? Guess we'll just have to wait 'til someone triggers an event.

120: Cerulean

I haven't even gotten past the Eastern Plains yet since I'm a solo craftsloser.

121: Shiro

Struggling much? lol

122: Sakkyun

A solo crafter-type attempting the Eastern Plains, huh...? No kidding. You'll probably need a base level of 7 at the very least, not to mention thorough prep.

123: Cerulean

Dammit, it's all because I got tied up and was one day late to the party!

My race level is still at five. I can make my own potions, but trying to get all the right equipment is pretty expensive. When I said I'm a crafter, I actually meant I'm an Apothecary.

At this point, I'm seriously debating whether I should redo my character and get that new title everyone's been talking about.

124: Shiro

By the way, I found a new section in the encyclopedia that wasn't part of the beta. It's labeled 'Miscellaneous' on the page about plants and fish. I can't complete that section at all.

What the heck is it *for*? Have you filled out the ingredients page, considering you're an Apothecary?

125: Cerulean

Not at all. Only medicinal herbs and poison hemlock so far.

126: Shiro

Figured as much.

127: Sakkyun

Guess we'll just have to leave it to the verification team.

Besides, we still have a ways to go 'til we fill out every single page in our encyclopedias.

128: Soldato

Hey, did y'all see the photo that was uploaded to the Quick-Eared Cats' notice board?

129: Shiro

>123

You could try forming a temporary party with other solo crafter-types.

What photo? This isn't about the Thou Shalt Not Kill title, is it?

130: Soldato

It’s an image of a super-hot, scantily clad dryad in a weird shrine somewhere.

Wonder where it was taken?

131: Sakkyun

Did someone say ‘super hot?’ brb

132: Shiro

‘Dryad?’ BRB

133: Sukegawa

‘Scantily clad?’ Be right back

134: Soldato

LMAO all y’all turned on by something different

135: Cerulean

I saw it. It was really pretty, wasn’t it?

Can’t tell where it’s taken, although I reckon it’s the dryad’s altar that was announced in-game the other day.

136: Soldato

Ditto. While I’d love to pay my respects to the dryad, I’ve no idea how to get there.

The Quick-Eared Cats simply mentioned that an investigation is currently underway. Maybe beta testers know something about it?

137: Sukegawa

I do.

138: Sakkyun

Me too. I’m still playing the clip, but this is the altar in the Town of Beginnings, isn’t it?

139: Shiro

Huh? The Town of Beginnings? Well, what’re we waiting for?!

140: Sukegawa

No can do. During the beta phase, the altar was only unlocked on the first Thursday of April. It wasn’t like anyone could enter either, and those that were allowed entry were chosen at random.

An additional skill called The Dryad’s Invitation was made available on the day the altar was unlocked. Only players who possessed that skill were granted entry from the Adventurers’ Guild’s basement.

I, for one, have never entered the altar. Loads of people have been looking for it since that announcement, but no one’s been successful so far.

141: Sakkyun

I visited the place during beta. You can receive a blessing if you make an offering to the dryad there—either an item or a skill if I remember correctly.

I got a recovery item called a ‘Sequoia Drop.’ Recovers 300 HP and MP, nullifies all status ailments, and restores hunger status to one hundred percent.

Hope they have it in the official version too!

142: Cerulean

Is that photo from the beta test, then?

143: Shiro

Don’t think so. The date said January 5th.

The person who found it must have given it to the Quick-Eared Cats.

144: Soldato

No shit. You’re saying someone somehow managed to find their way to that underground altar?

145: Sukegawa

Most likely.

146: Shiro

As a dryad fan, I’d give anything to go! But I’m not sure what to do.

147: Cerulean

If you can access the altar from the Adventurers’ Guild’s basement, then maybe there’s gonna be an event at the guild?

148: Sakkyun

That, or there’s some hidden entry point in the Lakeside Sequoia. It *is* a ginormous tree, after all. Wouldn’t be surprised if there was a cave or something at its roots.

149: Sukegawa

You know how there are a few restricted areas around the Lakeside Sequoia? Think they have anything to do with it?

I heard that you run into a keep-out zone if you try to climb the sequoia.

150: Soldato

I tried it myself and got blocked by an invisible wall after climbing for a while.

151: Sakkyun

Who knows? It’s like the symbol of this game, so it wouldn’t be weird if it eventually triggered some sort of event.

The Verification Clan made a list of quests that appear to be related to the Lakeside Sequoia, but they haven’t found one that seems to be the main trigger.

152: Sukegawa

As a matter of fact, we’ve got more errand-type quests now, although I doubt they have anything to do with the sequoia. They’re way too lousy.

153: Soldato

I still think the Lakeside Sequoia holds some kind of key, though.

154: Shiro

Thanks. I’ll go check out the tree.

155: Cerulean

Me too! I want the dryad to bless me!

What should I offer, though?

156: Sakkyun

Think I’ll do a little exploring myself.

***

The day after I planted the Lakeside Sequoia sapling, I logged in as usual and headed to our farm, only to be welcomed by a distressed Olto. He appeared flustered as he repeatedly tugged on my robes.

“Wh-What’s wrong?” I asked.

“Mm-mmm!” Olto moaned agitatedly. He was acting pretty weird, so I decided to follow him, and he led me to the Lakeside Sequoia we had planted the day before. He jumped up and down in front of the sapling, pointing at its leaves.

“Whoa, it’s already grown a little... The color’s kinda off, though.”

“Mm!”

The plant’s green leaves were dotted with purple spots. I glanced up at the Lakeside Sequoia in the east—obviously, no spots marred its leaves. Besides, Olto was frantic. Clearly, this couldn’t be a good sign. I assessed the sapling to see if I could find out what was wrong with it. Immediately, the words “Lakeside Sequoia Sapling (Phytoplasma Disease)” popped up.

“N-No way! It’s infected!”

“Mm!”

No wonder Olto was panicking! We’d propagated an ultra-rare item, only to find it on the verge of dying already!

“Wh-What should we do, Olto?!”

“Mmm...” He hung his head miserably in response. It seemed like there was nothing he could do about it.

“You don’t know either, eh?”

“Mm.”

“No need to look so glum.”

Having said that, we needed to do something about this situation, pronto.

“...Better head to Alyssa’s—no, the Farming Guild’s closer.”

First stop, the Farming Guild. If I couldn't get any information there, then I'd try Alyssa's place.

"See you in a bit!"

"Mm!" Olto waved me off as I dashed out of the farm, raced through town, and burst into the Farming Guild. "E-Excuse me!" I gasped, panting.

"Why, hullo. What's up?" the old man at the Farming Guild greeted me. I thought I'd gotten the short end of the stick after meeting the beauties at the Magical Beasts Guild, but I had to say, there was something extremely reassuring about old geezers! *I'll never complain about you again, Gramps!*

"Thing is, one of my plants on my farm seems to be sick... Here, take a look at this!" I said, showing the old man the sapling's data.

"Hmm, let's see. That a Lakeside Sequoia sapling ya've got? That's a rare one!"

"Looks like it got infected, though."

"Uh-huh. Judging from the color of the leaves, it's got phytoplasma disease..."

The old man's expression quickly changed from one of surprise to concern. It seemed like it wasn't an easily curable disease.

"There any way I can heal it?"

"Hmm... Well, I've heard good things about ya from the other townsfolk, so I s'pose it wouldn't hurt to tell ya."

All right! All was not lost!

"The Lakeside Sequoia, the symbol of this town, grants us three benefits," the old man began. *Oh boy*, I thought. It was probably best to pay attention, however, as there was bound to be something important somewhere in this lecture.

"The first benefit is its fruit. The tree's fruit provides divine protection to those who eat it."

It did say it boosted your resistance to status ailments. Made sense.

"The second benefit is its leaves. The leaves closest to the canopy possess

great potential for growth."

I supposed that meant the leaves at the top had special powers.

"Lastly, the water that has been purified by the Lakeside Sequoia over a long period of time gives life to this town and possesses healing properties. This water is said to cure living beings' wounds and maladies instantly."

"You're talking about the water that runs in the lake and canals, right?"

Would that water help cure my sapling's disease?

"Actually, no. Although that water has indeed been filtered through the Lakeside Sequoia, it's just regular water. What ya need is special water that's stored inside the tree."

Oh well, I figured that'd be the case.

"How can I get it?"

"You'll need a special tool."

"Tool?"

"Yep. It's a long-lost ceremonial implement called 'The Chalice of Hope.' In the past, the Sequoia Dryad used to share the healing water with the townsfolk who prayed to it."

Long-lost? Used to? So where was it now? Also, he mentioned the townsfolk —would *I* be able to use it too?

I pressed the old man for further details, but it seemed like he didn't know its current whereabouts either. Apparently, there used to be a shrine at the foot of the Lakeside Sequoia, where the ceremonial tool was kept.

"The chalice lost its powers after the dryad disappeared, and people eventually forgot about the shrine too. It should have regained its powers now that the dryad has awakened and begun appearing again, though."

"What shrine...? I feel like I would've noticed something like that..."

People would probably be buzzing if there was something as conspicuous as a shrine at the foot of the Lakeside Sequoia, but I'd never heard any rumors of the sort.

“The shrine fell into ruin and vanished ages ago. No idea where the chalice went either... I can tell ya one thing, though: I bet it’s still somewhere near the sequoia. It ain’t something you can carry around.”

“So it’s pretty big, then?”

“Yep. It’s carved outta a large rock and taller than the average person.”

That definitely sounded like a hassle to carry. Still, even with the shrine gone, a large stone goblet ought to stick out like a sore thumb. Perhaps I could find something about it in one of the forums.

“One more thing. You said the *townsfolk* can get this healing water if they pray to the chalice. I’m not from here, though.”

“Doesn’t matter. We see what ya do for this town on the daily. You’re as good as one of us now.”

I wasn’t quite sure if that added up, but I didn’t see any reason to argue with him.

“Okay, I’ll look for the chalice,” I told the old man.

“Better hurry. You’ll be lucky if your plant lasts another day.”

“G-Got it.”

That meant I had until the end of today to find this tool...!

I raced back to our farm as frantically as I had run to the guild.

“Olto! I found out how to save our sapling!” I panted.

“Mm!”

“I need your help, bud!”

“Mm-mm!” Olto exclaimed, flexing his arm muscles in a reassuring manner.

“Let’s go!”

“Mmm!”

I gave Olto a brief summary of the situation as we sped towards the foot of the Lakeside Sequoia.

“...Like I said, there’s supposed to be a huge stone goblet lying around

somewhere near the tree. That's what we're looking for," I explained.

"Mm!" He nodded.

On the way, I searched the forums for information regarding the chalice. There was no shortage of rumors about the Lakeside Sequoia since it stood out so much. Many people were also hard at work trying to prove various hypotheses.

"Mm."

"Mmm."

"Mm-mm."

Olto took me by the hand and expertly weaved our way in and out of people. Man, he really was one talented gnome. This allowed me to focus more of my attention on checking the forums.

"Hmm, don't see anything particularly standout."

I scoured the various threads, but found nothing regarding the shrine or chalice. How could that be? This was proving to be more challenging than I thought...

"I got nothing..."

"Mmm..."

Although we had begun our search in earnest after arriving at the foot of the Lakeside Sequoia, three hours later we were yet unable to find any trace of the shrine. Obviously, the same went for the large stone chalice.

We walked around the area in search of the shrine, peering between roots thicker than barrels and occasionally brushing aside thickets of grass. The shrine ought to have been a considerable size, given that it had once stored such a large goblet. Even if the structure had rotted away, there had to be some kind of debris left.

Unfortunately, not a single nail turned up, let alone scraps of wood. We were probably working with too wide of a search area. The tree was only about forty to fifty meters wide in diameter, but the thick, immovable tree roots were

spread out over an even wider space, intricately entwined with one another. The area they covered was about as wide as the grounds of my former junior high school—roughly three hundred meters. In terms of their shape, it was easiest to picture an enormous mangrove. It took a considerable amount of time just to walk along the outer edge of the tree.

“All that’s left now is the lake...”

Diving into the lake was out of the question. Besides, this lake had existed since the olden days; I doubted people would build a shrine underwater.

“Hold on, let’s think harder about this.”

Use your imagination, I told myself. Once upon a time, there used to be a shrine at the foot of the Lakeside Sequoia. However, over time, the shrine had vanished, and the stone chalice inside along with it. Now, where could it have gone to? Perhaps it was underground now. *Or*—I thought, having a realization *—the tree roots might have swallowed it up when they grew bigger.* While I sincerely doubted I could do anything if the chalice was inside the ground or lake, finding it didn’t seem impossible if it were trapped between the roots.

“All right, let’s focus on the roots this time!”

“Mm!”

Olto and I resumed our quest, carefully looking over the areas we’d already searched. We eavesdropped on countless other players who were exploring the areas surrounding the Lakeside Sequoia, but none of their information seemed useful to us.

“Hmm...”

“Mmm.”

“If only we can find some kind of trace...”

“Mmm.”

I paused and bent backwards, extending my spine. It wasn’t as if my back actually hurt since this was a game, but still. *Old habits die hard.*

“Hm? What about above...?” I thought, looking upwards. “Could it be up the tree?”

Who knew? The chalice might have been swept up by the growing sequoia. In my hometown, there had been a strange spot where you could see a scrapped car that had gotten stuck between the growing branches of a tree, suspended in midair. A tree of this size would have no problems lifting up a large rock.

“Well, better than searching the lake, I guess... Olto, we’ve gotta find a way up this tree!”

“Mm-mm!”

I looked up at the tree and made several discoveries.

“If we can reach those vines...”

“Mmm.”

“We can climb along the roots and hoist ourselves up.”

“Mm?”

“You’re right. The question is, how’re we gonna get from there to the vines higher up?”

“Mmm.”

“Whatever, let’s get climbing.”

“Mm-mm!”

I could see some fairly long and sturdy-looking vines dangling halfway up the tree trunk. It looked like we could climb pretty high if we used them, but they were quite a distance from where we currently were.

Struggling with the tangled obstacle course of giant roots, the two of us slowly made our way upwards. Though tiring, it was also kind of fun. It was exactly like one of those RPG routes where you traveled up the base of some kind of massive world tree—any fantasy lover would be ecstatic. I mostly had Olto to thank, though, since he was stronger and more agile than me, petite enough to squeeze through the smaller gaps.

“Mm-mm!”

“Th-Thanks, Olto.”

Olto gave me a hand, hoisting me up now and then, and with great difficulty

we managed to clamber up the Lakeside Sequoia.

“Whoa, check out the view.”

“Mm!”

We had climbed a considerable height now, perhaps around halfway up the roots. Although we couldn’t see the whole city yet, we had a pretty decent view of the Town of Beginnings.

“Shall we take a short break?” I suggested.

“Mm,” Olto replied.

Exhausted from the climb, Olto and I decided to stop for a short rest. We sat down on a tree root, and I sipped on some water as Olto munched on a honey dumpling. Climbing up humongous tree roots and sitting side by side with my gnome, marveling at the surreal townscape below, was something I could never experience in real life.

“Feels great, doesn’t it?” I sighed, drinking in the view. I closed my eyes every now and then as a pleasant breeze blew our way.

“Mmm,” Olto murmured in agreement.

As the two of us sat sunbathing, a voice suddenly came from behind.

“Excuse me.”

“Yes?”

It appeared that we were blocking the path and preventing others from going through. As it turned out, we weren’t the only ones climbing the roots. Judging from the number of players we passed by on our way here, it seemed we weren’t the only ones who’d had this idea.

“S-Sorry,” I apologized.

“Not at all, sorry for interrupting your break.”

Thank goodness this person was nice—I couldn’t help but assume that every person I met was secretly making fun of me. Some of the players I had passed by earlier had taken one look at me and started whispering amongst themselves.

“Are you planning on climbing to the top?” he asked.

“Yeah?”

“You know it’s a no-entry zone, right? It’s a dead end up there.”

“Huh? It is?”

According to this guy, there was an invisible wall a little ways up that prevented you from going any further. That itself seemed to be a well-known fact; he had simply come up to see if he could trigger an event. Unfortunately, I appeared to have missed the memo in my forum searches, since I’d mainly been focused on the shrine and chalice.

“Didn’t know that... I’ve made it this far, though, so I might as well keep going.”

“Well, the view *is* pretty nice up there. Cheers, I’m rooting for you!”

“Say what?”

“Like I said. Best get going now. Seriously, good luck!” the man turned around and hollered before climbing down the roots. What did he mean, he was rooting for me? We’d only just met.

“I guess he was just encouraging me.”

“Mm?”

“He said it was a dead end, but should we at least see how far we can go?”

“Mm!”

Besides, an aerial view might give me a better hint, I thought as we resumed climbing. Unfortunately, however, it was getting more and more difficult to climb. There were fewer footholds at this height, and the occasional breeze, which had been so gratifying not too long ago, now made the roots underfoot quiver threateningly. Worst of all were the narrow passages that we had to cross as though walking on a tightrope.

“D’aaaah! This is scary as hell!”

“Mm!”

“D-Don’t let go of me, Olto!”

“Mm.”

Couldn’t have asked for a more reliable companion than Olto, I thought for what must be the hundredth time since we began climbing. He crossed a passage first, held out his hand towards me, then pulled, and I managed to get to the other side safely.

“W-We did it!”

“Mm-mm.”

As I toppled to the ground in relief, Olto caught me up in his arms. *What a man!*

“Phew... Would’ve been a goner if I fell.”

We were pretty high up by now. Although it wouldn’t be painful, it would still be terrifying to fall from this height, not to mention that with my next death I’d start incurring penalties. It would be nice to avoid plummeting to my doom, if possible.

After an hour or so of climbing, we finally reached the top of the roots. However, there was no way to go further up.

“I wanna keep going, though...”

“Mmm...”

The vines, which I’d thought we could use to clamber up when we were at the bottom, in fact appeared to be another ten-odd meters above. *So near, and yet so far...*

“There are a few other creepers here, but they’re really thin... Think they’ll hold us?”

Unlike the super-thick, rope-like vines above us, the creepers nearby were as thin as strings. It didn’t look like they would support our weight at all.

“But maybe we can hold on to them while we use the grooves to climb... Whoa!”

I had reached out to grab one of the vines, thinking we could try wood climbing (not rock climbing), only to have my hand, and eventually, my whole

arm, get stuck in the Lakeside Sequoia trunk. Olto quickly grabbed me as the tree threatened to swallow me up whole.

“Mm!” Olto yelped as he frantically pulled at me.

“I-It’s okay, buddy.”

“Mm?”

“Look, not a scratch. This thing is pretty deep, though.”

Upon pushing aside the creepers, I discovered a hula-hoop-sized hole that had been hidden behind them. I stuck my head inside—the hole appeared to contain a passageway.

“Mm-mm?”

Olto stuck his head in as well and peered inside the cave.

“Well this probably goes somewhere, right?”

“Mm!”

We hadn’t yet reached the no-entry zone the guy had told us about, so this shouldn’t have been too much of a surprise. It was careless of me to assume there wouldn’t be something like this.

“All right, let’s go, Olto!”

“Mmm!”

Although it was quite dark inside the cave, that didn’t seem to bother Olto, who possessed Night Vision.

“Mm-mm-mm-mm,” Olto hummed, leading the way confidently. Despite the darkness, it wasn’t creepy like the tunnel underground, perhaps owing to the fact that the inside of the tree radiated natural warmth. It was a winding, sloping path, but a singular one, not forking in any direction. We continued to walk along it.

“Look, there’s light!” I exclaimed.

“Mm!”

We emerged to an expanse of green. I looked down and saw the entrance of

the cave below us.

“Looks like we’re right next to those thick vines!”

“Mm!”

The green wall that greeted us was actually the outside of the Lakeside Sequoia trunk, covered in thick vines. The path had been a circuitous one, but it seemed like we’d gone around in a loop within.

“Cool, we can start climbing again.”

“Mmm!”

However, climbing the vines proved to be quite difficult. Even though the creepers and leaves were thick and sturdy, providing plenty of footholds, they were still fairly unstable. Every time there was a breeze, the vines swayed dangerously, causing me to pause.

“Y-You sure make it look easy, Olto.”

“Mm?” Olto, who was climbing the vine next to mine, looked at me curiously. He had been right above me until a moment ago, but had now slid down, so we were lined up beside each other. He jumped from vine to vine like some sort of monkey, climbing up and down them. After a while, he seemed to tire of playing and slowly made his way up the vine next to me.

“Mm-mm!”

I supposed he was trying to cheer me on, but I wished he wouldn’t move around so much. I could feel the vines shaking all the way over here.

Finally, Olto helped me up, having reached the top first. I grabbed his outstretched hand, and he grasped it firmly and hoisted me the rest of the way.

“Mm-mmm...!” Olto cried.

“...the powerrr!” I yelled almost reflexively. Wait, since when did *Olto* know about those kinds of memes?

I somehow managed to climb up the vine, helped (and occasionally hindered) by Olto along the way. He did pull me up in the end, but I was still doing most of the climbing myself.

“Phew... Finally...” I gasped. I hadn’t been this active since I played on the obstacle course at an adventure park as a kid.

“This may be a game, but it sure feels nice to get in a bit of exercise,” I sighed contentedly. Too bad it had zero effect on my body in real life, though. This could be a serious problem for humankind in the future; i.e., being tricked into thinking you’d actually been moving your body after exercising in virtual reality and gaining weight as a result...

“Mm?”

“Nothing, sorry. Anyway, where are we...?”

At the top of the vines was a peculiar plaza, no larger than a small bedroom. There appeared to be a slight dent in the trunk of the Lakeside Sequoia trunk, in which a large object was buried—it probably got caught in the branches or something during the tree’s growth process and got swept up all the way here. The object was completely buried in the ground of the square, and had now become a part of the tree.

“Looks like it’s made out of stone.”

“Mmm.”

“Hm? Stone?”

Could it be...? I wondered, quickly rounding the object. It was shaped like a trophy, albeit a slightly crooked one, with a shallow, wide-rimmed cup. It even had a large handle on each side, and there was a white event marker clearly visible above it.

“This is it...! We found it, Olto!”

“Mm-mm!”

“What now, though...?” I pondered, touching the chalice. The next instant, it emitted a brief but powerful glow, followed by a *Ding!* and an announcement.

“Huh?”

“Mmm?”

“*You have met the necessary requirements for using the Chalice of Hope.*

Would you like to use it?”

I had no idea there were conditions for using this thing, but apparently I’d fulfilled them. Why wasn’t this chalice more widely known, though? Since there hadn’t been any no-entry zones on the way here, other players should have come across this place too. Or could it be that the marker only popped up if you triggered an event like I did? Although that did seem likely, it still didn’t explain why I hadn’t heard even the vaguest rumor anywhere...

“Eh, who knows.”

There was no point thinking about it, seeing as I was just a casual player. My top priority at the moment was obtaining this so-called healing water.

I opened my status window and selected Yes; the next instant, the Chalice of Hope glowed once more.

“Are you the one who offered a prayer to the chalice in hopes of being healed?” asked a familiar figure with emerald-green hair and a gentle smile, rising gently from the cup. “Wait, I know you... We met at the altar, did we not?” she asked.

“We did,” I replied. The figure was none other than the Sequoia Dryad from the underground altar.

“You seem to have earned a great deal of trust from the townspeople, which makes you more than worthy of seeking my assistance. Now then, my child, what brings you here, pray tell?”

Huh? Did I really have to explain why? I feared she would get mad if she knew that I had not only propagated her gift, but let it get infected on top of that. However, I *definitely* wouldn’t be getting any healing water if I lied and she found out about it. Being honest with her was probably for the best.

“To tell you the truth, I propagated the fruit you gave me and planted it on my farm, but it got infected.”

“I see. I appreciate you seeking help for my progeny. Yes, the Healing Drop is a miraculous substance capable of curing all diseases. You could very well use it to cure any injury or affliction instantly. Are you sure you would like to use such a powerful item on a mere plant? Think carefully: you can only use this chalice

once in your lifetime.”

Cures all diseases? What was it, some kind of elixir? In that case, it was bound to be incredibly rare. Not to mention I only had one shot...

“...I’m sure. I’ll use it to heal my sick plant.”

A noob like me had no use for elixirs, given that Medicine was enough to almost fully restore my HP. Besides, I usually completed games without ever touching any rare potions or tinctures—I couldn’t remember ever using an Eggdrasil Leaf or Jumbolixir—mostly because I tended to hoard them and miss any opportunity to use them. I doubted it’d be any different in LJO. *Better to use items while I can,* I figured.

“Very well. I shall bestow this item upon you.”

The dryad’s hands glowed, and a new item was added to my inventory.

Name: Sequoia Healing Drop

Rarity: 8 / Quality: 10★

Effect: Fully restores user’s HP and MP and cures all status ailments and illnesses. Can’t be sold or given away.

Talk about a super-rare item! I couldn’t sell or give it away, however, which meant I had to keep my promise.

“Th-Thanks so much!”

“May you always be kind and helpful to others.”

“I will.”

“I wish you all the best on your journey.” The dryad smiled at me before vanishing into thin air. There was the recovery item in my inventory, though, clear as day.

“Man, we really hit the jackpot!”

“Mm!”

Olto was jumping up and down in joy. Thinking about it now, he had been

unusually quiet around the dryad. Had he been nervous?

“Mm?” He looked at me inquiringly. He was always such a little rascal when he was with me, did that mean he didn’t respect me? ...Nah, it had to be a sign of trust.

“Let’s go back to our farm, shall we?”

“Mmm!”

Ah. I should’ve taken a screenshot.

Getting back to the farm was a rough ordeal, and I thought I was a goner several times on the way home. Sure, I had no one to blame but myself for not grabbing the vines properly and nearly losing my footing, but climbing down turned out to be way harder than going up. Lesson learned.

“Made it back in one piece...”

At least I could heal my plant now. Olto and I headed to where the sapling was planted, ready to put the dryad’s Sequoia Healing Drop to use right away.

“Let’s go!”

“Mm-mm!”

I pressed a few buttons and applied the item to the Lakeside Sequoia sapling. The plant immediately began glowing, and...

“Huh?”

“Mm?”

That was it? I’d been hoping for some sort of dramatic sparkly effect, but all I got was a faint glow.

“...It *did* work, right?”

Thankfully, the purple spots on the sapling’s leaves had disappeared without a trace, and the words “Phytoplasma Disease” no longer appeared. It looked like the Healing Drop had indeed cured the plant.

All that work for *this*? *Come on, devs, you could’ve come up with something more exciting!*

“Mm-mm! Mmm!” Olto did a cute little jig around the sapling, evidently pleased that it was free from disease.

“Well, so long as Olto’s happy.”

My precious Lakeside Sequoia plant was cured. It was time to rejoice.

Chapter Six: New Companions

Today was my ninth day in-game, although it was only the afternoon of day three in real life.

Thanks to Olto, our farm was doing great. My plan to earn money and XP by making and selling potions had taken off, and I had further expanded our farm. I had also purchased an additional mushroom log, so I could obtain more red panther caps.

The day before, I had managed to complete several delivery quests, raising my Magical Beasts Guild and Farming Guild ranks to rank 4, although my Adventurers' Guild rank was still at rank 2.

"Seriously, am I just a craftsperson now...?"

Whatever. Today, I was ready to start making some real progress. I had made plenty of Instant Killers and low-grade potions in preparation, as well as medicine. I also planned on using my bonus points to learn some new skills. For starters, I wanted a magic skill and a reconnaissance skill. Olto was going to tank for me and fight using magic and the various potions I made. Ideally, I wanted to try taming new monsters, too, although that all depended on the effectiveness of my battle plans.

First, I wanted to tame a monster that could be my frontliner. After all, I had to be able to fight properly if I was to make any progress. My ideal monster was a strong fighter-type; I needed a real heavy hitter to help balance my party. At the very least, it would probably stop me from losing so pathetically in the beginner areas.

I walked towards the South District where our farm was located, mulling over various strategies, when something made me stop dead in my tracks.

"Huh?"

What the heck was *that*? I blinked, rubbing my eyes. There were two enormous trees growing on our farm. That *was* my farm, right?

I knew that one of them was my green peach tree, which had been growing steadily each day. It was already about five meters tall and had bloomed just the day before. I was hoping I could harvest some of its fruit today.

What was the other tree, though? I'd thought that was where I'd planted the Lakeside Sequoia sapling, but it'd been scarcely a meter tall until yesterday. Now, it was roughly three meters in height. Wasn't it growing way too fast?

"N-Never mind that. Better go check on it!" I sputtered, dashing to the farm.

"Olto—wait, who are *you*?"

"Mm-mm!"

"...!"

Next to Olto was a pretty girl with long, pink hair, whose delicate features and pointy ears reminded me of an elf. She was wearing a cute and tight-fitting fairy-esque top paired with a yellow miniskirt and white thigh-high socks. Numerous decorative plants adorned her green outfit, which lent her an ethereal air and perfectly complemented her cherry blossom-pink hair. She was about 140 centimeters by my reckoning, slightly shorter than myself, and looked around twelve to thirteen years old. She could pass as Olto's older sister...

Was she an NPC? Other players couldn't enter your personal property without permission, but I'd heard that certain NPCs could.

"Her marker's blue, though."

Blue meant she was either a player or a magical creature belonging to a player. Red markers were for enemies, while yellow markers were for regular NPCs. White indicated event-related stuff, and green was for collectible items.

"Um..."

"...!"

As I was trying to figure out what to do next, the pink-haired girl got down on one knee and knelt in front of me, hand on her chest and head bowed deferentially in an obvious show of respect.



“Huh? What?”

“Mm-mm!” Olto hurried to my side as I gazed at the girl in bewilderment.

“Wh-What’s going on here, Olto?”

“Mmm.”

I hadn’t seen him mime like this in a while. What was he trying to say? I could see him drawing some sort of box in front of his face, then pretending to press something. It looked like he was pushing buttons on a large touch screen...

“Oh! You want me to pull up my status menu?”

“Mm!”

Bingo. Upon opening my status window, I noticed something different.

“There’s a new name under my Tamed Monsters section. Uh, Sakura?” I muttered.

“...♪” The girl raised her head and smiled at me. It looked like that was her, all right. Like Olto, she didn’t appear to be capable of talking. However, she was evidently one of my monsters, as she seemed delighted that I had called her name.

But why? I hadn’t the faintest idea how or why she’d appeared; I hadn’t even attempted to tame her. Could there be instances where monsters were already tamed beforehand? I guessed I was staring at one, but...

“...!”

Sakura gently tugged the hem of my robe, trying to get my attention.

“What’s up? You want me to come with you?”

“...!” She nodded. Looked like I’d guessed right.

“...♪”

Sakura led me to the Lakeside Sequoia, which had seemingly transformed from a sapling to a full-grown tree overnight. She then placed her hand on the tree and vanished from my sight as though having teleported.

“Huh?”

As I was trying to take in what had just happened, Sakura's face popped out of the tree.

"Whoa!" I yelped.

A girl's head protruding from a tree trunk—what is this, some kinda horror movie?!

Whilst I was reeling from the shock, Sakura emerged from the tree as though it was nothing.

"...!"

Okay, I get it now. She was most likely the Lakeside Sequoia personified. On top of that, she came with a preset name, which meant she was a unique specimen. Was she an ultra-rare monster?

Name: Sakura *Race: Tree Nymph* Base Level: Lv. 10

Master: Yuto

HP: 36/36 *MP: 38*38

Strength: 10 *Endurance: 12* Agility: 7

Dexterity: 5 *Intelligence: 10* Sanity: 14

Skills: Arboriculture, Tree Magic, Photosynthesis, Gather, Regeneration, Endure, Whip Skills, Water Resistance, Charm, Woodworking, Forest Ranger

Equipment: Tree Nymph's Whip, Tree Nymph's Garments

"D-Dang, girl!"

Her stats were well-balanced, and she possessed an interesting skill set, not to mention she was equipped to do farming as well. These stats were even perfect for a frontliner. Although using a cute girl as a shield seemed rather discourteous, she was just the type of monster I had been looking for. I'd be a wimp no more! I had been debating whether to obtain a weapon skill besides wand magic or not, but that settled it; magic skills it was. That was how it ought

to be—monsters in front, Tamers in the back.

“Okay, so we’re definitely learning magic. Question is, what kind? Olto already has earth magic. He can’t use it to fight, but it’s better to mix it up a bit, right?”

“Mm?”

“Hmm. How about water? Sounds like it’d be useful for farming,” I muttered to myself. Olto and Sakura nodded enthusiastically.

“You guys agree?”

“Mm.”

“...♪”

“Then water magic it is. I’ll need eight points for that. Oh, and another four points for Presence Detection. Wouldn’t wanna be snuck up on and attacked out of the blue.”

All set now! I finally had some skills I could use in battle, plus a new fighter to boot!

“All right. Think I’ll explore the outside of town once I’m done with my daily harvest and concoctions. Been eight days since I last attempted a trip.”

My tree had borne fruit, and I successfully harvested green peaches for the first time. I decided to set those aside and use the rest of my crops for concocting.

Before that, however, I had to see if my team was fit for battle. I had messed up big-time on the first day because I had failed to prepare. I needed to test my new skills and Sakura’s abilities, as well as Olto’s aptitude for fighting. That was actually a huge concern of mine. Even though Olto was a farmer-type monster, it would take ages for him to level up if all he did was farming. Ideally, I wanted him to gain some XP from fighting, too, but that would be impossible if he died early on in battles. I had to figure out if he could act as a tank or decoy, or if it was best for him to hang back while Sakura and I fought.

“Okay, let’s go deliver some goods before we go!”

“Mmm!”

“...!”

After delivering a few items to the guild, we finally exited town, and engaged in a few battles. Although I’d been worried at first, things were going better than I thought.

“Good job, Sakura! Hold ’em right there!” I shouted.

“...!”

“Aqua Ball!”

“Squeak!”

Miraculously, we were putting up a good fight, although I owed it all to Sakura. Her ability allowed her to create vines, which she used like whips to fight with. While that alone made her pretty powerful, her tree magic also made her excellent at binding and dealing status ailments. To top things off, she had a high defense, and a Regeneration skill for recovering HP, which practically made her an impenetrable fortress.

Sakura held my opponent in place while I attacked with water and wand magic, which won us most battles. My Aqua Ball was almost enough on its own to bring down a Gray Squirrel or Fanged Rat as long as I got a clean hit. Things would probably be different if we had to deal with several opponents at once, but at the moment, I was using my Presence Detection skill to single out lone monsters. I figured we’d be fine as long as we didn’t get ambushed.

Olto was doing a decent job at tanking. His defense was pretty high despite not possessing any means of attacking, which made him pretty reliable. Thanks to my two frontliners, I could focus on using magic.

“Chirp...”

“We did it!”

“Mm-mm!”

“...!”

The Aqua Ball I unleashed depleted the Gray Squirrel’s health meter, and the creature turned into light particles and vanished. One convenient aspect about

LJO was that there was no need to strip monsters of their loot after defeating them; the item drops were automatically stored in your inventory.

“That’s ten already. That should do it for Sakura’s and Olto’s abilities.”

Next was my turn. I needed to test how well I could fight on my own, although I fully intended on asking Olto and Sakura for help if I found myself in a tight spot.

“Found one,” I muttered, spotting a lone Gray Squirrel in front of me. While extremely adorable, looks could be deceiving. I, for one, knew that it was a vicious little monster who could easily drive me to the brink of death.

I nervously tightened my grip on my staff. Now that I thought about it, this was the first time I was facing a monster on my own instead of running away...

No, there was no need to be fearful. My opponent was one of the weakest creatures in the game, and I had a weapon and magic to back me up.

“Mm-mm!”

“...!”

Olto and Sakura were cheering me on as well.

“All right, I think I got this!”

Time to say goodbye to being a runaway coward! I launched an Aqua Ball and attacked first, determined to win.

“Take this, you little pest!”

A sphere of water roughly thirty centimeters in diameter shot out from the tip of my staff and hit the Gray Squirrel, catching it off guard.

“Chirp!”

The squirrel’s HP was reduced by half. The distance seemed to have lessened the ball’s impact, but no matter—I had gotten the first hit. *I’ll close in on it and use a melee attack next,* I decided, rushing towards the creature and swinging down my staff hard.

“Hiyah!”

Whoosh! I had missed.

“Grr. One more time!”

My staff swished through the air once more.

“It’s too small, damn it!”

Not only was it fast, but it was also tiny. I didn’t feel like I was going to hit it anytime soon.

“Chirp!”

“Damn it! Why you—”

“Chirp chirp!”

As I swung my staff about frantically, the Gray Squirrel charged at me, and we both took about ten percent of our HP’s worth of damage. I could tell that Sakura and Olto were watching from the sidelines with bated breath.

“Grr. Not bad, Sandy-Cheeks.”

“Chirp chirp.”

“D’ah!”

“Chirp!”

All right! It looked like I could hit it if we attacked each other at the same time. Even so, there was still only a fifty-fifty chance that I could get in a clean strike, but whatever. When my HP was about seventy percent depleted, I played my trump card.

“Cure!”

Mwa ha ha. My health was fully restored now, and there was plenty more where that came from. My opponent, on the other hand, only had about ten percent of its HP left.

“Who’s winning now, eh?” I snarked.

“Chirp chirp... Chirp!” the squirrel squealed in terror. I lunged at it, cackling evilly.

“*Muda muda!*” I taunted. *It’s useless!*

“Chirp...”

With a final strike I depleted the last of the squirrel's HP, and it vanished into light particles, its pitiful cries echoing in the air.

"I did it!"

I won a battle all on my own! *Say what you want, but it was still my first ever solo victory!* So what if I had seemed more like the bad guy?

"Okay, the next one's gonna be our last battle for the day. I'm counting on you two."

"Mm-mm!"

"...!"

Sakura and Olto both saluted me in reply. They really were adorable—though, where exactly did they learn to do that? AI monsters were a mystery. Once the medicine's cooldown had ended, I took out an item from my inventory that I had been saving for special occasions.

"Ta-da-da-da-da-daaah. Behold, incense!"

Olto and Sakura cocked their heads curiously. They'd had no trouble understanding other references, but it seemed like they didn't get this one, a scene where a famous cat robot takes useful gadgets out of his pocket. Why not, though? Did I do a lousy job at reenacting it?

Ha ha, as if. That was my go-to act at end-of-the-year drinking parties, and it always got a chuckle out of everyone. Of course, it was good...right?

"...Enough. The more you think about it, the worse the damage. Whatever. Anyway, back to the incense!"

The artifact I held in my hand was a handy-dandy item that had a one hundred percent chance of attracting unique specimens. To be honest, I had wanted to use it on better monsters like the Wild Dogs in the Eastern Plains, but I knew I would die for sure if I ran into a pack of them. A unique specimen was a unique specimen, even if it was a weak monster obtainable near the entrance of the Southern Forest.

Once again, a Gray Squirrel appeared before us. It had diamond-shaped patches on its back and forehead, a sure sign that it was a unique specimen.

“Olto, you handle defense. You’re up, Sakura.”

“Mm!”

“...!”

Olto attracted our opponent’s attention while my staff and Sakura’s whip steadily depleted the Gray Squirrel’s HP... Sorry, I got a little too cocky. Correction—*Sakura* was draining the squirrel’s HP; I barely contributed anything. Still, that was because I was avoiding using my magic, so that I didn’t accidentally defeat it, and also because I wanted to save my MP for later.

“We’re almost there. Sakura, focus on holding it down.”

“...!”

My plan was pretty straightforward: fight normally and reduce the creature’s HP, then use Sakura’s tree magic to restrain it and carry on depleting its health until the very last ounce with my Hold Back skill. After that, I would attempt to tame it, as long as I had enough MP for it. If I failed to tame it before my MP ran out, I would have to go ahead and defeat it, but we’d still have something to show for it, as unique specimens always dropped rare items.

“...!”

Sakura activated her tree magic, and numerous vines sprouted from the squirrel’s feet and snaked around its torso.

“It worked! First, Hold Back...then Aqua Ball!”

“Chirp!”

My Hold Back skill had a pretty neat effect when activated, making my body and the Aqua Ball I unleashed glow red. How cool was that?!

“Mwa ha ha, you only have 1 HP left now,” I cackled. The squirrel was truly on its last legs.

“Give it up and surrender yourself to me, li’l cutie! Tame!”

“Chirp!”

Some of my MP was depleted, but nothing happened.

“...?”

“Mm?”

Well, that didn’t go as planned. I wasn’t about to give up yet, though.

“Tame!”

“Tame!”

This wasn’t working at all; the only thing I had managed to do was drain my MP bar even further. *Keep going!* I urged myself.

“Tame!”

“Tame!”

Yikes. I only had enough MP left for one more attempt. But I’d been saving up my MP especially for this purpose! Was I not strong enough to take on unique specimens yet? *Who cares? I ain’t gonna give up now!*

“Come ooon, please work! Tame!”

“Chirp.”

“Huh?”

I could’ve sworn the squirrel glowed for a split second. I quickly checked my status window to find a new name under my Tamed Monsters section.

Name: Rick *Race: Gray Squirrel* Base Level: Lv. 4

Master: Yuto

HP: 18/18 *MP: 1010*

Strength: 4 *Endurance: 6* Agility: 14

Dexterity: 6 *Intelligence: 5* Sanity: 6

Skills: Vigilance, Collect, Pruning, Jump, Climb, Cheek Pouch, Incisor Attack

Equipment: None

“All right! I did it! Mwa ha ha, I finally got a creature with fur!”

My third monster in the bag! Granted, its stats weren't as great as Olto's or Sakura's, but it was just a Gray Squirrel, so I couldn't really hope for much more. Besides, its adorable appearance more than made up for its lackluster stats. True to its name, it had a sleek gray coat and bushy tail. It gazed up at me with round, button eyes and twitched its nose every now and then. It was simply too cute for words.

"Chirp?"

The Gray Squirrel, which had been attacking me not too long ago, now lay docile in my hand.

"*Sooo* fluffy!" I squealed.

Its fur was velvety, as though I were stroking a warm beanbag. This was heavenly... I could pet it forever.

"Chirp," the squirrel closed its eyes contentedly. It really was adorable.

"You're such a cutie patootie," I gushed. I had to say, though, what were the chances that all three of my tamed monsters turned out to be unique specimens?

Ding-dong.

"*Congratulations.*"

Hey, another announcement. Could this be what I think it is?

"*Since the first three monsters you have tamed so far have all been unique specimens, you will be awarded the title 'Unique Monster Enthusiast.'*"

Another title! I knew it! Were these things actually rare or what?

Title: Unique Monster Enthusiast

Effect: You have gained 10,000 G and four bonus points. Increases probability of encountering unique monsters and improves taming success rates.

While getting money and bonus points was always a plus, I was somewhat skeptical. If I encountered a unique specimen when I was low on HP or

something, it'd be game over for me since they were much stronger than regular monsters. Not that I could do anything about it now...

Oh well, might as well count my blessings. It was nice to have a better chance of taming creatures too.

"Let's head back to town. I'm out of MP, anyway."

"Mm."

"...♪"

"Chirp."

As it turned out, Rick, the Gray Squirrel, our latest addition, possessed a unique ability called Collect. I had assumed, based on its name, that it was similar to the skill Gather, but this wasn't any ordinary gathering skill—Collect focused on locating and gathering *items*. On our way back to town, Rick hopped off my shoulder and went off on his own, returning with a nut.

"This a blue acorn?" I asked him. I'd heard that blue acorns made food rations tastier, although I wasn't sure how much of an improvement they'd actually make.

Still, I was grateful for his help—he ended up bringing me four walnuts and blue acorns each on our journey home. I really hoped he wouldn't run off on me during a fight, though...

To my relief, I discovered that Rick wasn't able to travel very far. There were limits to the distance he could move away from me, and his item collection was limited to those boundaries. It was good to know that he'd still be nearby during battles; if anything, him not being right at my side could be useful when trying to launch a surprise attack on my opponent.

"Phew. Looks like we're back."

While I had enjoyed being able to fight properly for the first time, I was also exhausted, mentally in particular. Who knew battling monsters would be so draining?

"There's no place like home," I sighed in relief, once we were back at our farm.

“Mm.”

“...♪”

There was something comforting about being surrounded by greenery, and the two massive trees seemed to make the place feel much homier—even if being in the forest didn’t give me the same feeling. You never knew when a monster might leap out and attack you out there, after all.

I wonder if I can set up a bench to relax on? Having a tea table might be nice too. Although I couldn’t tweak the inside of my barn, no one had mentioned anything about the outside.

“Chirp chirp!” Rick squeaked.

“So, this is my farm. What do you think?”

“Chirp!”

He jumped off my shoulder and climbed up the green peach tree, then curled up on one of the branches. I was glad to see him enjoying himself.

“Mm?”

“Oh yeah, that reminds me,” I said, remembering as Olto tugged on my sleeve. “Here’s a walnut. Can you plant this?”

“Mmm?”

“Is that a no?”

“Mm-mm,” Olto shook his head and returned the walnut. What was he trying to tell me? That I could plant walnuts, just not *this* one?

I showed him the other walnuts that Rick had gathered for me, and Olto picked up one of them and nodded, seemingly satisfied. They honestly all looked the same to me, but whatever.

“Okay, I’ll leave it to you.”

“Mm!”

“I’m heading out for a bit.”

“...♪”

The farm would be fine as long as Olto and Sakura were there, so I left them in charge and headed to Alyssa's stall.

"Hi," I greeted her.

"Hey, fancy seeing you here at this time of day," she replied. "Come to sell me potions or info?"

"Both. First, the usual," I said, handing over the medicine and potions I had concocted. Next up was some new info.

"You really are full of surprises!" Alyssa chuckled. "No one else has sold me as much information as you have. So, what is it?"

"It's about a title."

"...Again?" she looked at me exasperatedly, no longer surprised.

"I got it when I tamed my third monster just now," I said, showing her my new title in my status menu.

"I see. So it's a title related to your job."

Her expression changed, now looking slightly more convinced.

"Do other jobs have titles like this too?"

"Yep. Alchemists can obtain a title known as 'Originator' if the first five things they create are original items. Summoners get a title called 'Unique Monster Lover' if the first three monsters they form a bond with are all unique specimens."

That was the hard part, though. Even with planning, getting unique monsters or crafting original items from the outset was difficult unless you'd gotten a lot of bonuses. By the time you found out about these titles, it'd be too late to get them.

"Then you already know about 'Unique Monster Enthusiast?'"

"Yeah, it's hot off the press. I've already had two titleholders come to my place."

As a matter of fact, this morning's dataset had reported that there were now a total of fifteen titleholders: there were apparently a few players with job-

related titles among them.

“We actually discovered this title during the beta phase. We didn’t have time to verify it, however, since the person who obtained it did so on the final day of the test. Consequently, we were unable to post the details in the forums. Turns out some former beta testers who knew about it were still after that title.”

“That doesn’t add up, though. Surely, you’d have more than three tamed monsters if you played until the final day of the beta test?”

“Not necessarily. There are a few ways around it. It’s possible if you obtain Tame later on in the game, or switch jobs and become a Tamer.”

Gotcha. As long as the first three monsters you tamed were all unique specimens, you didn’t necessarily have to be a Tamer. That meant you could still get this title even if you obtained the skill Tame later on.

“In that case, wouldn’t it be pretty easy to get ‘Unique Monster Enthusiast?’ I mean, you could obtain Tame and Command at the outset, then use those skills to tame a unique monster each time you run into one,” I mused. However, Alyssa shook her head.

“It’s not that easy. You must’ve had a hard time taming Rick, didn’t you, Yuto?”

“I did. Almost ran out of MP doing so.”

“Even Tamers with Monster Taming abilities struggle. The odds of a player with only Command and Tame taming a unique specimen are probably less than a hundred to one. Their opponent will most likely flee first, or they’ll run out of time before they can do so.”

Running out of time, otherwise known as Time’s Up, referred to a fight’s time limit. In LJO, the time limit for battles, excluding raids and boss fights, was thirty minutes max: if you went over the allotted time, you were forced to quit. If you thought about it that way, it seemed pretty unrealistic for non-Tamers to aim for this title. The same could be said for me if I wanted to get my hands on other job-related titles. *Guess there’s no such thing as a free lunch,* I sighed inwardly, deciding to ask about Sakura next.

“I’d like to buy some info now. Know anything about tree nymphs?”

“I do. They’re supposed to be quite rare, though... Don’t tell me you tamed one?”

“Sure did. She was my second monster,” I replied, explaining how I got Sakura. Suddenly, Alyssa stood up and cut me off.

“W-Wait a minute!”

“Sorry?”

“How can you be so *calm*?!” she exclaimed. For some reason, she was tearing her hair out. “You’re telling me you entered a no-entry zone at the Lakeside Sequoia, met the dryad, *and* got an item from her? C-Calm down, Alyssa, deep breath... I’ve *got* to hear the details!”

Although she’d seemed extremely disconcerted, she soon regained her composure and pestered me to spill more, so I tried to be as thorough as I could. It wasn’t as if I had anything to hide, so I related everything that had happened, from how my plant got infected to how I obtained the Sequoia Healing Drop and cured it, showing her my logs every now and then.

“I see.” Alyssa breathed out a deep sigh once I was done with my story, looking exhausted. Was I that bad at explaining things? As a working adult, that kind of hurt my ego.

“Is something wrong?”

“What? How *could* I not be shocked after hearing something that incredible?”

“Huh? Is this really that unusual?”

I’d told her about the Sequoia Dryad before, and besides, there were plenty of players who climbed that tree. The chalice might have come as a surprise, but surely there had to be a few people who’d come across it. Or so I thought...

“‘Incredible’ hardly begins to describe it!”

After organizing my information, Alyssa informed me that the place Olto and I had stumbled upon had actually been uncharted territory. In fact, the whole area surrounding the vine-covered entrance was designated a no-entry zone. It seemed that I’d been able to enter the area since I was in the middle of a special event.

“I can’t tell what triggered it, though...”

“Huh? Must’ve been my Lakeside Sequoia getting infected, right?”

“Not necessarily. Based on what I’ve seen, the Sequoia Healing Drop’s clearly meant to be used on players. Using it on plants like you did is highly unusual, which means that there must be some other event that requires the Chalice of Hope.”

She did have a point. Did entering the no-entry zone require you to trigger quests or events that involved curing diseases? Oh well, guess that was for the Quick-Eared Cats to find out.

“Never mind that, I wanna know more about tree nymphs,” I said, trying to return to the subject at hand.

“Oh yeah, that’s right. Sorry for getting off track there. Couldn’t help it.”

“No worries. Do you have any info on them, though?”

“Just a bit. At the moment, it’s unclear which areas tree nymphs appear in, but from what I’ve heard, they sometimes spawn in old forest trees. During the beta test, there were reports of sightings of them in Zone One, but apparently, people have only encountered them in Zone Two onwards in the official version.”

I supposed they were somewhere between field bosses and unique specimens then.

“Their abilities also differ a bit depending on the type of tree they come from.”

According to Alyssa, this was the basic data on tree nymphs:

Tree Nymphs

Slightly high in Endurance and Sanity

Skills: Arboriculture, Tree Magic, Photosynthesis, Regeneration, Endure, Water Resistance, Woodworking, Forest Ranger

Equipment: Tree Nymph's Weapon, Tree Nymph's Garments

The skill Endure prevented them from being blown away, while Forest Ranger rewarded bonuses for time spent in forests. In addition to the above, Sakura possessed Gather and Charm as well—perks of being a unique specimen, I supposed.

"So, are you selling me the info you just told me?"

"I don't mind, but are you sure you want to buy something so vague?"

"You've got the logs and screenshots to prove it, so there's no doubt it's a real event. Anyway, we have to investigate it further! Besides, I'm sure people would be glad to know that planting a Lakeside Sequoia sapling will help you obtain a tree nymph, although it'll be a while before they can actually try it out themselves."

I hadn't thought it'd be that hard, but it seemed like obtaining a tree nymph the way I did would prove to be a real challenge for other people. For one, there were only so many ways you could visit the altar at the moment, so it was difficult to obtain a Lakeside Sequoia fruit. In addition, you needed Arboriculture to grow one, a skill that other players currently lacked, as you apparently needed to raise your Farming level to level 40 to obtain it. Even the current top Farmers were only around level 30 or so, which meant they still had a while to go. On top of that, you would need a Command ability in order to get a tamed monster, possibly even Monster Taming, depending on the creature. In short, you'd specifically have to be a Tamer who'd obtained Arboriculture, and grown a Lakeside Sequoia.

Simply put, if other players wanted a tree nymph, it'd be much easier and faster for them to walk around forests and look for one. It was more or less all due to Olto that I'd been able to tame Sakura.

It'd be impossible to hide her existence if I planned to walk around with her, so it was probably better to make her details public, rather than keep them to myself and risk being bashed. I made up my mind to sell Alyssa my information, which earned me 3,500 G, minus the money for the tree nymph stats.

"Come again soon!" She waved me off cheerfully.

Online Forum [Gather ’Round Tamers, Part 2] LJO Tamer Megathread

Share the deets on new tamed monsters, show off your companions, etc.—this thread is for everyone!

- Bad-mouthing other Tamers is not permitted.

- Screenshots gladly accepted.

- Avoid double-posting.

- Be mindful of what you post.

72: Ursula

So Silver-Haired’s a Tamer then?

73: Eulenspiegel

Yep! Plus, I think that gnome belongs to him!

74: Ivan

Gotta say, I’m surprised. Means they were added to the pool of available monsters when the game officially launched, right?

75: KingOysterMushroom

Pretty much, considering they were only found in Zone Three during beta.

Just make sure you obtain Advanced Tame with your initial bonuses—it all comes down to luck after that.

I say getting a gnome as your first monster's a huge miss, though. After all, they can't fight to save their life.

76: Eulenspiegel

Yeah, I've heard about that. Amimin mentioned that on their page.

That's probably why Silver-Haired died three times on the first day.

77: Ivan

Bet he tried his hardest to fight one way or another.

Three times, though? Even if your monster can't fight, can you really die *that* easily?

78: KingOysterMushroom

It's possible if he'd banked on his monster to do all the fighting and allocated all his points to crafting.

79: Ursula

Whoa, talk about tragic!

I'm rooting for him, though. There aren't many of us, to begin with, and compared to Summoners, we just aren't as flashy. Even Amimin isn't getting as much attention as him, even if it *is* negative attention.

Who knows? If he manages to become a top player, people might start seeing Tamers in a different light.

80: Eulenspiegel

True that. I have loads of friends rooting for Silver-Haired too.

Besides, I saw him with another monster yesterday, so he should be fine.

Never seen anything like it: it was a female humanoid monster. Couldn’t assess it, though, since I only saw it in passing on his farm.

81: Ursula

But if it’s his second monster, that means he got it in-game, right? There are only supposed to be six types of monsters available around town...

A female humanoid? Think he bought it at the guild?

82: Eulenspiegel

That’s exactly it! I wanna know HOW he got his hands on that monster!

I visit the guild almost every day, so I’m familiar with all the buyable/sellable monsters on the list.

Of course, it *could* be that Silver-Haired’s guild rank is higher than mine and our listings are different, but...I doubt that’s it. Since he’s gone the farming route, it’s hard for him to earn contribution points by slaying monsters.

Think he'll tell me how to get that monster, if I ask? I've never even talked to the guy, though, so I guess I gotta start by befriending him first!

83: Ivan

Good luck, looking forward to your report! I'm curious too.

It's not that I don't want to talk to him, but it's been kinda hard to since that incident.

84: Amelia

Hey, guys, long time no see.

Do any of you know if you can use a Hold Back attack when using magic? Specifically with Aqua Ball.

85: KingOysterMushroom

>83

I doubt it'll be that easy.

86: Ursula

>84

A Hold Back attack is a type of wand art. Why are you asking about using it with magic?

87: Amelia

I was gathering glowing walnuts in the Southern Forest yesterday, and I saw another Tamer battling with a squirrel.

I heard them use an art called Hold Back, and then they

were bathed in a red light. After that, they used Aqua Ball—still with the same red glowy effect—which clearly hit the nearly dead squirrel, but the squirrel didn’t die.

That totally means they combined a Hold Back attack with their Aqua Ball, right? Or could it have been their monster’s ability? There was a little boy by their side, which turned out to be a gnome when I assessed it.

88: Eulenspiegel

A gnome? Was that Silver-Haired then?

89: Amelia

Come to think of it, they did have silver hair.

So that’s Silver-Haired? First time I saw him. He was pretty cute.

90: Ursula

Don’t be fooled. *Everyone* looks hot in this game. Sometimes I wish I actually looked like this in real life...

91: KingOysterMushroom

There’s a separate thread for that, so take your woes there!

92: Ivan

There is? Definitely not reading *that*. Bet it’d deplete my Sanity in an instant...

But whatever, you’re saying Silver-Haired was using Hold

Back? No way.

93: KingOysterMushroom

If that’s true, that’s a pretty big deal.

94: Amelia

How so?

95: KingOysterMushroom

Hold Back is a special skill that was discovered recently. All attacks used just after its activation get a Hold Back effect, which means you don’t have to worry about accidentally killing your opponent no matter how strong your attack—even with an item like a bomb. It’s basically a boon to us Tamers.

96: Amelia

Wow! I want it! Do you know how to obtain it?

97: KingOysterMushroom

I do. It’s not easy, though...

98: Ivan

I gave up the idea as soon as I read about it on the Quick-Eared Cats’ page.

I mean, not killing a single living being (excluding plants) for four days in-game since your first login? That’s impossible.

If you manage to do that, however, you can get a title called Thou Shalt Not Kill, which grants you the skill Hold Back.

I might’ve considered it if I were still on day one or two, but I’ve already made too much progress for a do-over. Besides, if I rebuild my character, I’d have to say goodbye to my bud, Snake.

Just so you know, I’m not breaking any rules by writing this here since this info has already been made public by the Quick-Eared Cats.

99: Amelia

Redo my character?! No can do! I’ll DIE without my Bun Bun!

100: Ursula

Wait a minute, *Silver-Haired* was using Hold Back?

101: KingOysterMushroom

So you’ve noticed, eh? That’s right, Thou Shalt Not Kill was discovered four days ago.

The people who bought that info from the Quick-Eared Cats and attempted a redo have either just gotten that title or are still in the process of obtaining it.

According to the second survey from the devs, there’d only been one person who’s obtained Hold Back so far. That means the only player who could’ve used the skill Hold Back yesterday was the one who discovered the title Thou Shalt Not Kill in the first place.

102: Eulenspiegel

So Silver-Haired was the first person to discover it? Wow! That’s our rising star (TBD) for ya!

103: KingOysterMushroom

There’s more. The titles thread is currently going nuts after people found out that the top titleholder now owns three titles.

There are only fifteen titleholders at the moment to begin with, and the other fourteen only have one each. And yet, the top titleholder already has three. Everyone’s dying to know who it is.

104: Ursula

Huh? Hold up. If Silver-Haired was the one who used Hold Back, then we already know what two of his titles are.

One’s Silver-Haired something, and the other’s Thou Shalt Not Kill. He has to have one more then. That means...

105: KingOysterMushroom

Precisely. Amelia, you better not go around telling other people.

106: Amelia

...Sorry. I’ve already told a few of my friends about Hold Back.

107: Ivan

Guess even more people will be paying attention to what Silver-Haired does next.

***

After bidding Alyssa farewell, I made my way to Lewin's shop where I had bought my robe, in order to buy some gear for Rick.

"Unlike Olto and Sakura, he didn't come equipped with anything."

Plus, I'd made up my mind to play as a rearguard, which meant I also needed to buy a new staff, which I had been putting off until now.

Upon arrival, I was greeted by Lewin, who looked as much like a hardened silversmith as ever. It looked like he had accumulated some new weapons stock too. The disorderly heap of items made the shop feel more cluttered, and practically screamed "master craftsperson."

"What's up? Lookin' for something?" Lewin asked.

"Actually, yeah. I tamed a squirrel recently and was wondering if you had any equipment. I'd like to buy him some armor."

"A squirrel, eh...? How about these, then?"

"Are those bandanas?"

Name: Scarlet Bandana

Rarity: 1 *Quality: 8*★ Durability: 100

Effect: Defense +4, minor paralysis resistance.

Weight: 1

Name: Jade Bandana

Rarity: 1 *Quality: 8*★ Durability: 100

Effect: Defense +4, minor poison resistance.

Weight: 1

"Yep. You can wrap them round their neck," Lewin explained. I liked that they were nice and light, too—no worries about Rick being weighed down.

“I dig it. How much do they cost?”

“That’ll be 3,000 G each.”

“I’ll take the red one then.”

Red just seemed like more of his color, and if we’re talking fantasy scarves, it’s gotta be red, right?

“Here ya go.”

“Can I check out the staffs too?”

“Oho. So you’re finally gettin’ a proper staff, huh?”

“Yeah. I’ve decided to fight mainly with water magic.”

Up until now, I’d refrained from getting a new staff, even considering obtaining sword, spear, or bow skills. Now that I could rely on Sakura to do the heavy lifting though, I figured it’d be best to buy a proper staff once and for all.

“What’s your budget like?”

“Hmm. I’d like to keep at least ten thousand on hand, so...about 12,000 to 16,000 G.”

“In that case, I’ve got these options for ya,” Lewin said, showing me several different items.

“They all look pretty good.”

I had three options before me: a staff made from giant dogwood that was specialized for magic, a water ore staff that could handle melee attacks, and an enchanted oak staff. While not as powerful as the other two, the oak staff was highly durable and suited for longer battles, due to its heightened ability to automatically recover MP. I assessed them one by one and eventually settled on the following:

Name: Giant Dogwood Staff

Rarity: 3 *Quality: 6*★ Durability: 130

Effect: Attack +3, Magic +21, minor decrease in energy expenditure when using water magic, medium increase in

energy expenditure when using fire magic.

Weight: 1

“Think I’ll go with the Giant Dogwood Staff. The Water Ore Staff is cool, but it’s too heavy.”

Besides, I couldn’t pass up a staff that gave water magic users a slight edge.

“I’ll take that one, please.”

“Gotcha. That’ll be 14,000 G.”

I immediately whipped out my newly purchased staff and equipped myself with it.

“Whoa! Looks great!”

The wooden staff was similar in color to my blue robe. The carved-out grip was a light blue shade, its rounded tip a deep navy, formed of concentric rings. It looked like some sort of fancy living room lamp.

Heh, I was now a full-fledged wizard.

“I’m back,” I announced upon arriving back at the farm.

“Mm-mm.”

“...♪”

“Chirp chirp!”

Olto hugged my waist, and Sakura gingerly grabbed my left hand. Rick shinnied up my arm and perched on my shoulder, rubbing his head against my cheek. It sure was nice to be welcomed home by such cuties. I patted everyone on the head, and they all beamed back at me. I played with them for a while before finally remembering Rick’s bandana.

“That reminds me, I have something for you, Rick.”

“Chirp?”

“Can you climb down for a sec?”

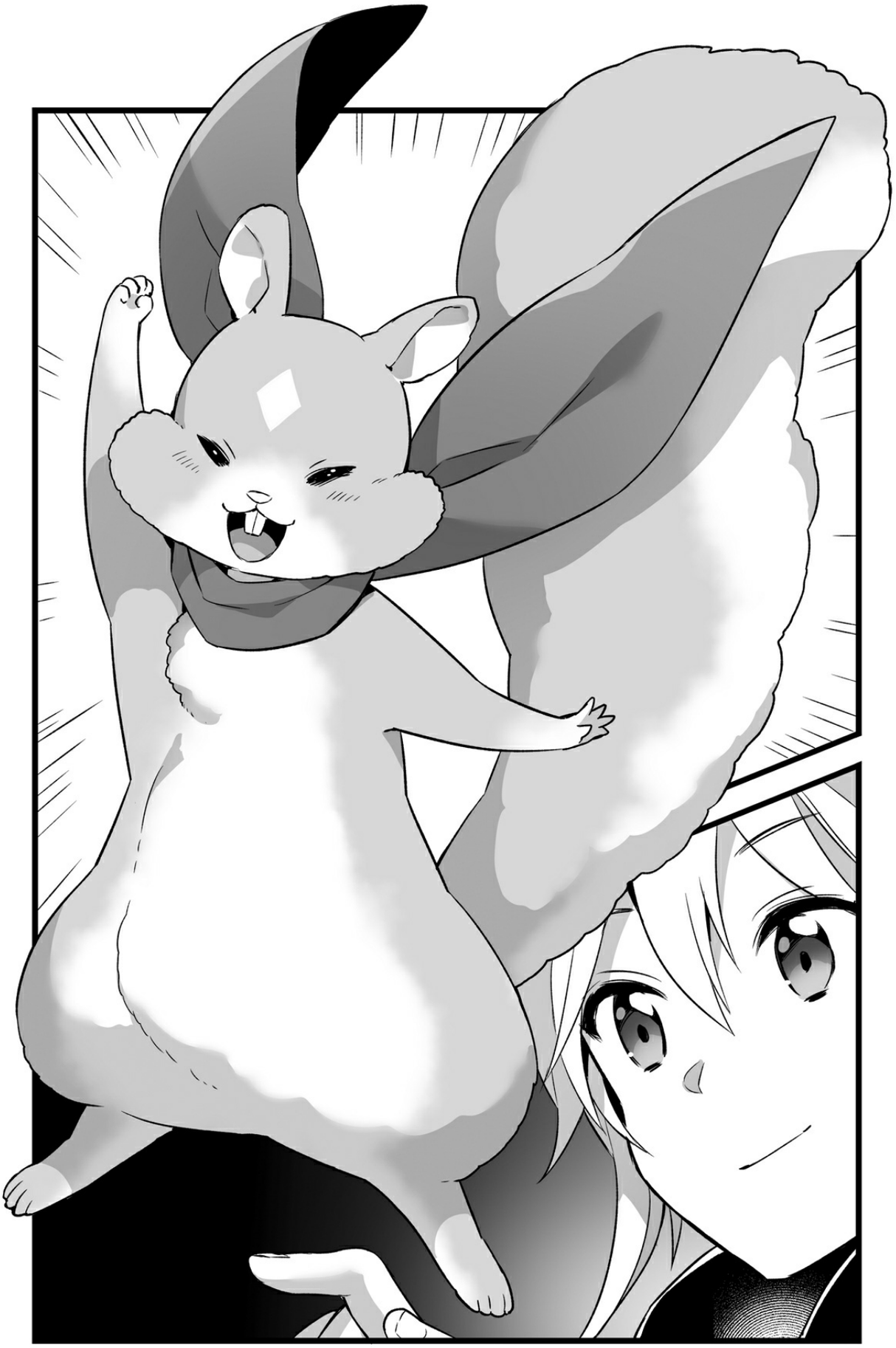
“Chirp chirp!”

No time like the present, I figured, letting Rick down on the ground and tying the newly acquired bandana around his neck. Although it would’ve been easier to do it from my status window, I wanted to tie it for him myself.

“How is it? Not too tight?”

“Chirp!”

It seemed to fit him just right. Rick stretched his tiny body as far as he could go and put his right paw in the air like a student raising his hand.



Olto hoisted an overjoyed Rick on his shoulders, tossing him into the air in celebration while Sakura, ever the big sis, watched over them.

“Mm-mm♪”

“Chirp chirp!”

“...♪”

We were one big family now, and things would only get merrier once I acquired more monsters. I couldn’t wait to see what was in store for us.

“Let’s keep up the good work, guys.”

“Mm!”

“...!”

“Chirp!”

All three of them saluted me in reply. Guess Olto wasn’t the only one who knew his military manners.

“I won’t lie—I was pretty worried in the beginning, but I’m excited to see how things will pan out now.”

While I highly doubted a player like me could rise to the top, I could still find ways to enjoy the game; I was already having a whale of a time as it was. I would start from the bottom, and figure out my own gaming style. With renewed determination, I turned around to face my companions.

“Let’s all do our best and have fun together!”

Epilogue

I breathed a deep sigh as I watched Yuto disappearing into the distance. Although he spoke to me respectfully as though I were his elder, he was probably older than me in real life. Not that it mattered in-game, though.

But seriously... Although he seemed utterly clueless about it, he'd been dropping bombs nonstop within an incredibly short space of time. The new title, Thou Shalt Not Kill, had already raised a storm, and now he'd brought me a slew of information regarding the Lakeside Sequoia Dryad, including a ton of highly specific details. No beta tester, not even the top players who had gotten off to an excellent start, had made this many discoveries. There were a few who had been doing well, but it was still nothing compared to what Yuto had uncovered.

Recently, it seemed that he had earned the moniker "Silver-Haired" online, which had become even more widespread after that incident where dozens of players had their accounts deleted. Apart from beta testers, his name was probably the one mentioned the most in forums.

And yet, why was he so modest—or rather, more accurately, so timid and lacking self-confidence? He didn't seem to know how big of a deal his discoveries were. Being a beginner who joined from the official launch was probably one reason, but the biggest reason was most likely his title. Because he'd died three times from the get-go, he seemed to think he was utterly without skill. I was sure that the incident in the square had also contributed to his mild manner—no doubt he had been the butt of plenty of jokes.

"Well, better than arrogant douchebags who think the world of themselves."

I wondered what his gaming style was like, though. Whatever it was, I just knew he was headed in a direction beyond our imagination. He was bound to start up some drama again—I could feel it in my bones.

"Wonder what kind of interesting news he'll bring us next...? Heh heh, I'm excited."

Afterword

Greetings. I'm Yuu Tanaka, the author. To those of you who've read the previously published version, hello again. First-timers, it's a pleasure to meet you.

Some of you may already know, but this text has been republished under a different publisher. I've also made a few changes to the story, so I hope you enjoy it.

One of the themes of this book is full dive VR games, but have you ever wondered what would happen if they became a reality?

Imagine it for a second. First, that sort of advanced technology is usually developed in the military and medical fields, or so I've heard. Those two fields are usually where technological advancements come from, after all.

VR technology can of course be extremely useful in those areas. In terms of military use, it could be used to train troops for combat without them having to risk their lives. You could also test new weapons relatively cheaply. Not only that, but by using virtual realities to design and develop things, you could probably reduce R&D costs significantly. I'm not sure if those potential savings would be used for something else or for just strengthening the military further, though...

Even an amateur like me can tell that the possibilities are endless. Who knows? VR technology might follow the same route as computers and become available for personal use later on.

However, it might be even more useful in the medical field. With full dive VR technology, you could practice performing as many surgeries as you want. You could also apply it to developing new medical tools. You might even be able to simulate surgeries beforehand by creating photo-accurate avatars based on patients' data. There might come a time when people can practice in games before performing actual surgery.

Please excuse my rambling. Anyway, what I wanted to say was, “All you engineers out there! Please make full dive VR technology a reality soon!” (lol) *It might not win you a Nobel Prize, but gamers all over the world will thank you for it!*

As for me, I’d like to use full dive VR technology for eating. If there was a software that allowed me to eat all the delicious foods in the world, I’d definitely buy it. I bet VR dieting would become a trend then. You could eat until you’re full in-game, so you’d no longer have to eat in real life... Although, that sounds really bad for your health.

Lastly, I’d like to thank a few people.

First, Micro Magazine. I’m totally indebted to you. Thank you for choosing to publish my humble little story that had nowhere to go.

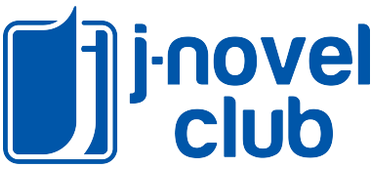
To my editor, I-san—you’re the best! Thank you for your apt advice, despite the added difficulty of handling a work that was previously published by a different company.

Nardack, I’m grateful for your beautiful and adorable illustrations. The characters seem ten times cuter with your drawings.

To my friends and relatives back home, thank you for listening to my terrible whining without complaining. Please keep everything you heard to yourselves, I beg you.

And, I’m grateful for all the people who helped get this book published. This book is the result of dozens of people’s hard work.

Lastly, I thank my readers for supporting this series. It’s all thanks to you that this book got to see the light of day again. Thank you so much for reading until the end, and I hope to see you again in Volume Two.



Sign up for our mailing list at J-Novel Club to hear about new releases!

Newsletter

And you can read the latest chapters (like Vol. 2 of this series!) by becoming a J-Novel Club Member:

J-Novel Club Membership

Copyright

A Late-Start Tamer’s Laid-Back Life: Volume 1

by Yuu Tanaka

Translated by Yuko C. Shimomoto Edited by Diana Taylor

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Copyright © 2018 Yuu Tanaka Illustrations by Nardack

All rights reserved.

Original Japanese edition published in 2018 by MICRO MAGAZINE, INC.

This English edition is published by arrangement with MICRO MAGAZINE, INC.

English translation © 2021 J-Novel Club LLC

All rights reserved. In accordance with the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, the scanning, uploading, and electronic sharing of any part of this book without the permission of the publisher is unlawful piracy and theft of the author’s intellectual property.

J-Novel Club LLC

j-novel.club

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

Ebook edition 1.0: October 2021