

## Hemirtal-13

James chuckled to himself. Right, whatever he wanted, in the next day and some hours he had left. That meant one change, maybe two, depending on if the twenty-four hour was set to the game clock or it a cool down.

His quest tab was flashing, Get a Handle on Things and Whistling while We Work had completed while he was figuring out his new abilities. Only one left and he'd—

The quest tab flashed again and he opened it.

Quest Complete: The Surly Hammer

Congratulation, you have convinced Dominic, the Blacksmith, to delivered the weapons he had been contracted to forge. You have been awarded 5 levels in the One-Handed Sword skill, 1 Fame point, and Charles the Trainer's gratitude. Return to Charles to finalize your joining of the militia and receive the sword.

"What time is it?" he asked the Innkeeper.

The man glanced out the window, the sky was darkening. "Must be an hour before sunset."

James supposed it made sense for time not to be kept precisely, how prevalent had clocks been in whatever time period this was recreating?

"Say, if I were to work for you, could I get a room out of the deal?"

"I don't need anyone working for me," the innkeeper replied.

"Not right now." James smiled. "But eventually, P1—Strangers will come, right? What about then? Will you be able to handled all of them by yourself? You don't want to loose customers because you haven't found someone to serve them, right?" the man nodded. "So, how about it? I work for you in exchange for a meal and a bed." James offered him his hand.

This time the innkeeper looked at the hand.

"Let's shake on it," James pressed. "If I'm already working for you, it's one less thing you'll have to worry about when the Strangers arrive." What were the odds they'd arrive in mass before James was pulled out?

"You have yourself a deal," the innkeeper said, putting his hand in James.

Do you want to add Osborn as a companion?

Yes/No?

James looked at the message as he shook the hand. He thought yes before letting go and wondered what in the conversation had triggered the option. Was it the offer to work for Osborn? He didn't think so, since he had the impression as companions worked for him, not the reverse.

“Where’s the room?” James asked and the innkeeper pointed to the stairs.

“It’s on the left.”

At the top of the stairs, James expected his room to be the first door on his left, but that was an open archway, one large room and twelve beds, each able to sleep six people. James had the impression that wasn’t so one of them could have a lot of sleeping room.

He went up to the third floor, and that was had individual rooms. Four were large, with one bed like the ones in the common room, three were smaller, with beds half their size and two had a bed that only fit a single person. The locks on those rooms were simple keys, which James expected he could pick easily if he had the right tools.

And the skill, he reminded himself. It didn’t matter how good he was in the real world, he’d need to practice it here first.

He considered renegotiating the agreement so he’d get a singles, but decided he had better things to do. He wanted to talk with Charles before night fell, see about finding a merchant to empty his bags. Maybe buy better clothes. It was one thing not to be in rags anymore, and he didn’t expect to be able to afford the types of clothing he was used to in the real world here, if they even sold suits, but he wanted something better than common clothes.

He looked at the common room again and approached one of the beds. Suspecting what would happen, he touched one.

You are in the common sleeping room of the Tipped Cup and Bed. Do you want to reset your spawn point?

Yes/No?

He nodded to himself.

Spawn point reset

He roll his eyes. It didn’t matter. He wasn’t planning on getting into any fights. But now the common room made sense. Players only needed beds for spawn points. When they needed sleep they’d log out. It wasn’t like they were going to actually lie down and close their eyes. The other room would be so they could store their items. He expected the rooms were much more expensive.

“I’m going to be back in a while,” He told the innkeeper as he left.

He had to ask for direction to the training grounds, other than the quadrants, the town was a confusing mess of alleys and courtyards. Whoever had designed it know nothing about city planning.

Charles was standing by one of the training dummies, the weapon racks were full of weapons, including bows. James supposed that a lack of wood would lead to a lack of bows too, but he doubted the programmer had considered that when they’d set up the quest chain.

“Greeting, William,” the trainer greeted him.

“Greeting Charles,” James replied, not bothering to offer his hand.

“Thank you for your assistance now the militia will be able to function properly. Have you come to join us?”

“About that, what schedule would I be expected to keep?”

Charles nodded. “City patrols are shifts of four hours, and as part of the militia, you’d do two of them a day.” Eight hours, He didn’t have that kind of time, but he wanted that sword. Being properly armed in games like these was important.

“How about I only do one patrol a day?”

The trainer shook his head. “I couldn’t justify the gold per week you’d be paid for half the work.”

“I get that, so how about I work for you, do one patrol a day, and you pay me one gold a month?” Even if he wasn’t going to be pulled out, in these games, city work wasn’t how players made money. James offered his hand. “How about we shake on it?”

The trainer considered the hand before taking it. “One gold a month, one patrol a day, and when there’s a monster attack, you fight with us.”

Do you want to add Charles as a companion?

Yes/No?

Yes.

“Are there a lot of attacks?” James asked. It was either the offer to work for them, or the handshake. Or maybe the intent behind both?

“No, a few skirmishes with the forest patrols here and there. The last time there was an attack...” he trailed off. “That was a few years ago. We lost good men.” The shadows over his face left and he nodded. “Now, I’d agreed to a sword if you joined.” He took one off the closest rack. “This will serve you well.”

James took it, and a tab flashed. He opened it.

Shimmerland Militia Sword, One-handed.

A standard sword used by the Shimmerland militia.

James went to buckle it, and realized he was out of slot on his belt. He’d filled them with bags for the item he collected from the townsfolk. At least he could hold it in his hand.

“Is there a store where I can sell stuff?”

Charles looked at the sky, which was now streaked with red. He shook his head. “The shops close two hours before sundown. You can check with the quartermaster.” He indicated a building at the back of the training area. “He might be willing to take some of what you have, but only if the militia can make use of it.”

James nodded, then had an idea. “Can you do me a favor? You have slots on your belt that aren’t taken, can you hold on to one of my bags for me?”

“Certainly,” the trainer answered.

James exchanged a bag of pants for the sword, the switch happening without him

having to do anything and handed it to Charles, and it appeared at his belt.

So he could use companions as carriers. That was good to know.

“Now, about armor.”

“Armor is provided for you patrols, to be returned once it’s over.”

“Is there any way I can borrow a set if I want to explore the forest? I might have to fight some of the monsters there.”

Charles shook his head. “We only have enough to outfit the active patrols.”

James nodded. He might be able to manipulate someone, probably the quarter master into giving him a set, but having someone as a companion didn’t give James the ability to have them do things outside their personality. Or at least no more than if he influenced them. Barkley had fought with him, Charles carried one of his bags. If James had to make a game association, they were more like party members than slaves.

“Whose in charge of the town?” he asked.

“We are,” Charles answered.

“But there has to be a town leader, or a council, how about an elder?”

The trainer shook his head. “No, we do what we have to so the town functions.”

That made no sense. Even villages had to have someone making decisions in time of emergencies. Was this bad programming, or part of something else?

He called up the settings and looked for the logout option again. Still not there. So he didn’t have anywhere to go. If the shops closed, and he was certainly not stepping outside of the town at night, that left him with plenty of time to look over the help files.

“Thank you for the sword,” James said. “When should I come for my patrol?”

“Anytime before sunset. As a new recruits of the militia, I don’t want you to do a night patrol, that’s when the worse of the trouble happens.”

James nodded. “Then I’ll see you tomorrow.”

As he returned to the inn, people planted tall stave at the side of the road and lit the ends. Torches? Hemirtal had magic, so why resort to torches to illuminate the night? James realized he hadn’t seen anyone perform magic, not even the druid. Was magic something reserved to players?

Night has fallen.

Night is a time of danger. Please seek safety within a settlement or ensure you have protection against wandering night time creatures. The administration reminds you that Hemirtal is a game, and as such be played in moderation. Night time is a perfect opportunity for you to log out, stretch your legs, take care of your body and get a proper night’s sleep. System Note, logging out does not despawn characters, please ensure you are on a bed, or inside your house or encampment to avoid cluttering the landscape.

The message was meaningless to James, since he lacked the ability to log out, and serious players would play until their bodies forced them out. He’d read stories of players resorting to drugs to continue playing. Those too invested in games were going to make use

of every second to increase their wealth, ranks or whichever system games used to mark them as better than the rest.

James could see Hemirtal filling up with obsessed players only logging out to deal with the minimum required to keep their bodies going.

The inn was in sight when James received a new system message.

You have been playing for sixteen hours. The administration recommend that you find a bed and log out for at least eight. As a safety feature, you will be disconnected at the twentieth hour and prevented from logging back in for four hours. Hemirtal is only a game, it's goal is to allow you to relax, enjoy yourself. Please take care of your body and your mind. Get some sleep.

Now that was interesting. If the game was going to force him out, he had a way to avoid being caught. What time would it be outside the game? He reached for his phone to check it. Right, no phone ingame, no clocks either.

It had been early afternoon by the time he'd gotten into the building, then no more than an hour by the time the alarm sounded. So the game was what, eight hours behind him? A little less? Night time here would be evening there. The building would be shut down, security down to a minimum. He could work with that.

"Evening Osborn," he greeted the innkeeper. Did the NPCs sleep? The shop closed, so those NPC had to go somewhere, but the inn remained open all night, right? "Do you need me to do anything?"

"Greeting, William. No, everything is well."

"I'm going to go to bed then, I'll see you in the morning." Wow. maintaining appearance was ingrained deep in him. No only didn't Osborn care, but James wouldn't be there in the morning.

"Sleep well," the innkeeper replied, still drying a mug.

James took the first bed and sat comfortably before calling up the help files and starting to read. It wasn't like he'd need them, since he was getting out, but he did want something to do while he waited for the disconnection, and he liked the world, once it opened to the public he'd see about getting in.

The world was composed of town, and only towns, which could only grow through the influence of the players. In that way, Hemirtal had a city builder aspect to it, although the help file didn't explain how players could make a town grow in to a city and larger.

He'd gone through the advantage and disadvantage list and was partway through the first level modules when he received a system message.

You have been playing for twenty hours. To ensure you take proper rest, you will be disconnected and prevented from reconnecting for four hours. It is the administration's hope that you have used your warning time to get to a safe place. If not, do not be surprised if you are at your respawn point when you log back in as you will have died during that time. Please ensure you take

care of yourself. Hemirtal is only a game.

The world went back.