

Chapter 21: Meeting

BOOM!

CLASH!

TRUUM!

The sounds of miasmic beasts being crushed to death through the power of many elements resonated across the small forest of Ents where Mark had spawned, their cries of agony were like music to his ears, as they meant more EXP.

Three different beasts made out of the elements of the world and represented special spirit beasts were finishing off a large group of Miasma Beast, a new Event Monster that had begun to spawn everywhere in the world after the Demon King of Dark Miasma World Boss was introduced into the game with the latest game patches.

Ding!

[You defeated [Dark Wolf Beast: Lv6]!]

[You defeated [Dark Bear Beast: Lv4]!]

[You defeated [Dark Tiger Beast: Lv7]!]

...

Mark glanced at the battle's rewards, as he acquired several dropped items and some cash as well as EXP, the most important thing. Any player would always want to level up in an RPG game after all, and the fastest way to do it was always by destroying monsters and gaining EXP.

Mark had been grinding non-stop since he started the game. There was actually a quest in this forest given to him by the Ancient Ent, but the quest by itself was about just cleansing the forest from the monsters and Dark Beasts

that were eating away at the roots of the Old Ents sleeping as trees in this forest, so he had to just slay beasts, a pretty easy quest.

He had already mostly cleansed the entire forest, and although monsters would continue to spawn, they were now smaller in quantity and their levels didn't go up with him, so he was being forced to eventually move out of this place and find another place with better leveling areas to increase his level.

CLAAAASH!

"GRYYAUU...!"

POOF!

Mark used his gigantic log arms to crush the living hell out of a Dark Beast in the shape of a Wild Bat, which exploded into dark fog and dissipated afterwards. Aside from being a Druid with the ability to summon Beast Spirits based on animals and elements, he was also able to harbor their power inside of his body.

By using the power of the Spirit Beast of Strength, in the shape of a Gorilla, he was able to boost his physical strength to a great degree, especially because this Skill had no cooldown as they were the specialty of Druids. However, he couldn't use it all the time. Only four Spirit Beasts could be summoned at the same time, and they were not really like normal summons but more like manifestations of his powers and spirits. Although they didn't need to sleep nor eat, they would constantly drain his Mana when summoned, so he couldn't bring them out all the time and had to rest after going through a grinding session.

Ents were already incredibly durable and strong due to their weight and the hardness of their old wood covering their bodies. They didn't even need armor as their entire body was like an armored fortress, nor weapons as their fists were enough to crush stones, they were said by lore to be the "guardians of nature" and they really made them like that by how strong they could be as long as they were close to places with a lot of nature concentration.

However, perhaps by seeing how this Race had not many benefits outside of such places, Mark had decided to pick the Druid class which was able to harbor the power of all elements of nature, even in a desert where an Ent would be at a disadvantage, he would be able to summon the Spirit Beast of

Wind and Earth, or even new ones that are unlocked over time and leveling, class changing, and evolving.

This way, he was able to compensate for his race's weakness through employing the versatility of spirit beast summons... but if the Druid Class was so good, why was it so rare? Well that was because of its insane MP costs for everything, and how to maintain a summon you needed to constantly feed it Mana... unlike actual summons that simply summon a helper that didn't need Mana. Spirit Users such as Druids and other similar Job Classes were not popular as they always needed a bit of "rest" after grinding, and not everyone had enough time to waste. Most players enjoyed leveling up fast and exploring everywhere, but Mark liked to relax and take things easy.

"Phew... Well, that was nice... I can feel that I got a lot of stress out with this." He sighed in relief. "Now come back you guys, or you'll drain me out of all my Mana..."

A Wind Bird, an Earth Bear, and a Fiery Lion all jumped towards Mark and dissipated into spiritual essence, quickly being unsummoned. He could summon them back at any time, but for now it was better to let them rest. The gorilla-like spirit inside of him boosting his strength also disappeared quite quickly.

Mark looked into the distance, as he found the border of the small Ent Forest, and saw a vast grassy plain covered by all sorts of trees here and there, there was also several rivers and a beautiful and large lake in the distance, and a bit farther away, there was an even bigger forest, the spawn area of Dryads, the Forest of Beginnings.

"The Ancient Ent told me to go there to aid the people that are being affected by some sort of disease... I don't know if I should bother with these annoying quests to be honest..." He thought. "I could always just go farther away into the mountains, the next leveling area, but perhaps I should stay here and see if there is any good reward, the Ancient Ent Reward for cleansing the forest was a pretty good equipment piece, this red core has enhanced my mana regeneration a lot..." muttered Mark as he glanced at the red jewel in his chest. This was the only equipment that Ents could use, named "Earthy Core" which was a special organ that boosted all their capabilities and could be refined by absorbing the essence of nature.

There were many types of Earthy Cores, and each one had a different color and shape, some even boosted specific playstyles or granted special abilities,

and as an Ent evolved, they would be able to equip more Earthy Cores inside of their bodies to enhance their abilities further.

"Welp, I should really get going, the clock is already telling me its time..."

Mark quickly logged out as he took out the helmet and stood out of his bed, he stretched a bit and sighed in relief as a calm smile emerged on his lips.

"Well, that was fun... Playing as an Ent is not that bad when you got a Druid Class... To think I would end up using the least meta of all races and job classes combined... They make for a surprisingly fun character to play..." He thought, as he walked into his bathroom, washed his face a bit and decided to wash his teeth.

Afterwards, he packed his things and walked away from his home, quickly moving back to his workplace where he found Jenny sitting over his chair with her legs over the table while drinking a soda. The girl had a gothic style with clothes and always wore big black boots, which stood out a bit too much.

Mark sighed internally, although Jenny was a genuinely good girl, she was also quite uneducated, but he had to admit she worked pretty good and also didn't treated him as if he were a king in a pedestal, she treated him like any other human being, which he appreciated with so many bootlickers' coworkers he had experienced to be with through his job.

However what she was doing was a bit too much now.

"Jenny! Get your foot down the table. Also I am deducting that soda too." Said Mark. "Are you done with the storage things?"

"A-Ah! Boss! Yeah, I am..." she said. "Hahah, please, don't be like that, I am a hard worker! Let me have this soda on the house."

"No." said Mark while furrowing his eyebrows. "Anyways, is Elayne here yet?"

"Nope..." said Jenny. "I see you're impatient today... I bet you want to kiss her around already and say "Oh, Elayne, I've always loved you! Mooch, mooch! I don't care if you were married or have a daughter! I am okay with milfs!" ...!"

"E-Eh?!" Asked Mark, progressively growing redder. "D-Don't mess around with stuff like that! I am your boss, respect me a little bit..."

Mark sat down at the side of Jenny as he began to drink a soda as well. Jenny and he were like friends at this point, and he allowed her to talk to him like this due to their relationship.

"Okay Boss~ Sorry about that..." she said. "But I know I'm right."

"You smug little...!"

Before Mark could say any other word, Elayne entered the place in a breeze.

"Mark, are you there?"

(Elayne's POV)

The croquets were already done, and the mashed potatoes too. I had also made the salad earlier so everything was alright for now. I have yet to make Tartar Sauce, but I will just buy one in the market with Mark.

I quickly moved out of the kitchen and checked on my daughter. I saw my girl and her friend still playing in their room, so I left them there and walked outside and quickly reached the mini market and found Mark and Jenny drinking soda together. The two seemed like good friends and a nice pair. I wondered if they would get together eventually, I always saw the two talking a lot.

Jenny was a nice girl, she was around 18 and she was a hard worker, she had a sharp tongue but she's always nice with me...Although with the Boss, Mark, she sometimes gets a bit over the top, but that was because they seemed to be good friends and might have a relationship too.

I wonder if he'll ever confess to her! That would be cute to see... Maybe he wanted to ask me for advice? I know Jenny a bit, but I don't think I could consider me her friend yet... but I'd try to help him as much as I can, I just want to see him happy, he's such a nice boss.

"Mark, are you there?" I asked while entering the mini market and pretended I wasn't seeing them talking for a bit.

"Ah! E-Elayne!" said Mark, as he got a bit surprised and grew red like a tomato. "Y-You're here..."

"Yeah! How are you, Jenny?" I asked. Jenny smiled gently at me as she waved her hand.

"Hello Elayne, I'm doing good, how about you? I just learned you invited this Casanova to eat with you," She said, suddenly smiling rather smugly. "Don't let him take advantage of you or something, even if you're alone now, he might still try to be a homewrecker, hahahaha!"

"H-Huh? What do you mean?" I wondered.

"N-Nothing, don't mind it..." She sighed.

"Jenny, you're getting on my nerves, I'm lowering your pay if you continue being like this." Said Mark angrily.

"Ahaha, don't worry, she's cute," I said. "I came here to buy something as well, do you like Tartar Sauce?"

"I do...!" Said Mark. "Want some?"

"Yes!"

We quickly bought some Tartar Sauce and he said that it was on the house. Jenny looked at him rather pissed.

"Oi you make me pay for the soda but the sauce is on the house? That's unfair as hell!" She said angrily.

"I-It's not unfair! Elayne invited me for lunch, so I am just cooperating," said Mark.

"Haha, don't worry, you can discount it from my pay," I said with a smile while petting his shoulder.

"I-I would never! It is the least I can do..." He said. "I-I also brought a good wine we can enjoy together."

"Oooh! Nice! Then let's get going!" I said, as I quickly walked out of the market and Mark stood there watching me go for a few seconds. Was he watching my back? Did I have some kind of stain on the back of my jeans?

"Hey, come on now!" I said.

"R-Right!" He said.

Chapter 22: Could This Be Considered A Date?!

We walked back home as Mark smiled back at me like the good man he always was. He always smiled so cutely; I sometimes felt like pinching stretching his cheeks. He was still young so he still got that youthful appearance of a teenager sometimes, despite being way over that age.

"Elayne, I wanted to thank you for inviting me today to have lunch with you..." He said. "Personally this time..."

"Oh, I-I did it on a whim without thinking about it too much..." I said. "But I am glad that you're happy over it, Mark."

Mark suddenly blushed a bit more. He more, he was a very shy man sometimes, although he showed a braver face before others, when he was around me, he was always like this. Perhaps because I was his friend so he was more open.

"I-I see... Well, sometimes little accidents can bring a lot of new possibilities to the future..." He said. "A-Anyways, how's... erm, how's your daughter?"

"Elena? She's with Anna in their room playing this VR Game..." I said.

"VR?" He wondered. "Which one?"

"I think it is..." I said. "Brand New Life Online. Do you know about it? It is often played by teens but there are some adult people that play it... I-I... of course I don't play it..."

I had to keep it a secret that I played the game to not sound awkward or weird, that was a game that young people played, if he were to know I played such a thing he would have a bad impression of me, most likely...

"O-Oh, yeah, it is something that... young people play,." He said while averting his gaze and getting a bit nervous all of the sudden. "A-Anyways, I guess she's enjoying it, but wasn't it a bit expensive?"

"Yeah! I had to pay a lot for that thing..." I sighed. "But my girl really liked it, even though she's always calm and says a few words, I am sure she liked it."

"I-I am sure of it!" Said Mark. "She seems to be a good girl..."

"Sorry if she said something weird to you, she's not usually like that,." I said.

"Oh, no, it doesn't matter, please don't worry about it." Said Mark.

We walked back home, and we quickly got inside, I quickly walked back to my daughter's room while Mark put the wine over the table.

"Elena! Anna!" I said. "Come eat lunch now, you said you wanted to eat lunch."

The two girls were still inside the game, but the headset has a function that sends messages to the player when there was somebody calling them to come out, which is a pretty convenient technology. The two girls quickly took out their helmets after logging out.

"Mom, I was about to reach Level 190..." sighed my daughter. "Couldn't you wait a bit longer?"

"Elena, real life is more important than games, dear..." I said. "Come eat with the rest of us, Mark is already here and he's waiting for you all to come eat."

"Okay..." Elena said.

I ignored her complaints which were very childish, eating lunch was more important than just leveling up.

"Nice, I was getting hungry already," said Anna. "Eating in the game feels nice but there's nothing better than actually filling your real stomach!"

The two girls quickly sat down around the table with Mark in there as well, Mark decided to sit down near my left side while Elena at my left side, and Anna to the right side of Elena.

"Today there are croquets and mashed potatoes with tartar sauce and a nice and fresh salad..." I said. "Mark do you like it?"

"Yeah, I love mashed potatoes," said Mark. "I am sure anything you would cook would be tasty, Elayne."

"Oh my, you always are so nice," I said. I quickly served him a plate with food, the croquets were freshly deep fried and were crunchy outside, as I had added some panko to them as well, the mashed potatoes was creamy but not liquid at all.

And lastly, I put a small pot with tartar sauce for everyone to add to their croquets, I also put some mayonnaise, ketchup, and mustard.

"Tartar Sauce..." Said Elena, she seemed to have missed this sauce. She quickly took a spoonful and put it over her two croquets, while adding some to her portion of salad as well.

"I don't like it, but I do like ketchup~" said Elena, quickly adding ketchup to her croquets and a bit over the mashed potatoes and mixing it up until the mashed potatoes turned slightly red, I suppose she liked that flavor.

Mark waited for the two girls to serve themselves before acting, then he got himself some tartar sauce over his croquets, and then he decided to serve some wine.

"Wine?" He asked.

"Sure! Can you open it?" I wondered.

"Yeah, I brought one of these," said Mark. He pulled out a special tool to remove the wooden cap that wine bottles had, and took it out.

POP!

With a small sound, the compressed air of the wine came out of the bottle, as the delicious smell of a wine that has been resting for a while filled our nostrils. The smell was quite good, and it seemed to be an expensive wine at that. Mark really shouldn't have bought such an expensive wine...

"Here..." Mark said, serving my cup with some wine. And then he served himself.

The girls were drinking the soda they bought in the minimarket.

"This is a fine wine I bought some time ago; I was saving it for a special occasion, but I believe it is a good occasion to use it now..." Said Mark.

"I-Is that so?" I asked, surprised. "I am glad you think that!"

I decided to give it a go as I tasted the wine. Rich in flavor, aromatic and fragrant, it was a bit sweet too, and the aroma it had was similar to strawberries... It was quite citric, yes... Ah, it was sweeter than I thought! However, it was still quite spicy, and the strong flavor made me want to eat the food to see how it all came together.

"Ooh, this is good!" I said. "It tastes nice."

"I am glad you like it..." said Mark, taking a sip. "Hm?! It is really good! Yeah..."

"It doesn't taste at all like the cheap wine we find around the minimarket, this is really nice," I said.

"Indeed... The flavor is really encompassing, my mouth is filled with it now... Well, thanks for the meal," He said, as he quickly began to dig in. He used a fork to cut down a piece of the croquets. It had tender cooked meat inside mixed with many veggies I added and seasoned with spices, and then he ate it with the tartar sauce.

Crunch, crunch...

He looked like a cute hamster stuffing his cheeks with food. He looked very happy, and his face grew progressively more impressed, even raising his eyebrows.

"This is so flavorful... I never thought I would eat such croquets in my life," he said. "They're better than the ones my grandmother used to make, this is amazing, Elayne, you're really good at this."

"Really?" I asked. "I just made them on a whim because I wanted to eat them, but I am glad you liked them!"

I looked at Anna and Elena, the two were concentrating on eating while they looked at their phones, I guess the girls were in their own world at that.

"Is the food good?" I asked.

"Yeah..." said Elena, as she looked angrily back at Mark. "It is..."

"Hehe, I am glad! And don't be rude, don't look at our guest like that..." I sighed.

"..."

Elena averted her gaze from Mark and continued looking at her phone, Anna smiled nervously back at us, she was acting surprisingly more polite now, perhaps even she was more polite than Elena sometimes.

"Would you turn off your phone while there are guests, dear?" I asked. "You should interact more..."

"..."

Elena looked at me very pissed, furrowing her eyebrows even more, she then turned off her phone and saved it in her pocket.

"Okay..."

She began eating with a grumpy face, but at least she obeyed me... That was what mattered, the intention! Yes... Mark seemed a bit nervous, Elena generated some sort of dark aura around her that made her hard to approach, which made me wonder how Anna got so close to her.

We enjoyed the food while talking in between bites, although my daughter barely spoke, Anna was quite active in the conversation sometimes.

"So we are already in the middle of the year, huh?" said Mark. "We are getting close to vacation... Do you have any plans?"

"Yeah, I was planning on going to visit my mom's house, Elena misses her grandma as well," I said.

"..."

Elena didn't say anything but seemed a bit surprised.

"I wanted to spend the vacations with Anna," she said after a while.

"Eh? Me?" Asked Anna. "Elena, go visit your grandma, don't be like this."

"Ugh..." Elena seemed to not want to go see my mother! But I would force her anyway.

"I see..." said Mark. "I-If you have any free time, want to go out? With... me?"

"Huh?"

"Eh?"

"Ah?!"

All three of us looked at Mark with surprised faces. Did Mark just ask me to go out with him? Like... wait, that's a date, isn't it?

My daughter suddenly began to look at Mark with a death stare, her eyes could almost glow red from how suddenly angered she got, and her aura was progressively growing darker... Was she becoming the embodiment of darkness or something?!

Anna was surprised though at her side, while raising an eyebrow.

"Wow, did you just ask Elena's mom on a date?" she asked.

"Eh?! Ah... N-No! It wasn't like that!" said Mark. "I just thought it would be nice to go out... Like friends... Friends always go out and do stuff together... Like you two girls, right?"

"R-Right!" I said. "So that's what it is... Sure thing, Mark! It has been a while since I even went out... It would be nice. I could bring my friend Rita too, you'll love her, she's such a nice woman."

"S-Sure, if you want to... But I thought something between the two—Ah!" Mark barely managed to say some words before he noticed Elena staring at him even more furiously than before, he quickly stopped talking and decided to accept what I said.

"It is okay, I am glad," He said. "I just feel it is boring to spend my vacations inside my apartment... Sorry if that came out of nowhere."

"Oh no! Don't worry about it, Mark," I said. "We friends have to help each other if we can! I am also alone most of the time, Elena is always in her own world as you can see..."

"Sounds like a plan then..." said Mark.

"Sure, I will try to find some time for it though," I said. "I hope you can understand."

"I do! Sure thing, thank you for considering it," He said.

Mark was bolder than I thought, but he seemed to have good intentions and nothing weird. I was glad, he's a nice man. I've never had male friends before, but I should just treat them like my female friends, right? Friends were friends no matter the gender.

After we were done having lunch, we were all stuffed and Anna and Elena decided to go back to Elena's room.

"Thanks for the meal, Lady Elayne! It was pretty tasty!" said Anna.

"Hm," said Elena as she walked.

I sighed. I wish I could spend some more time with her and talk more with her, but she escaped the moment we finished eating... Ugh. But perhaps in the game we'd be able to connect some more together, right?

At the end, Mark and I were the only ones sitting around the table, and we drank a bit of wine while talking about whatever that came on our mind. After some time, he rose to his feet.

"I should really go now, I don't want to bother you anymore," he said.

"Oh you're not a bother, Mark," I said. "Take care."

I hugged him and kissed his cheek, as he blushed a bit and felt embarrassed.

"Y-Yeah, you too." He walked away rather nervously but happily.

Chapter 23: After Thoughts

Mark walked back home with a rather happy expression on his face, after having worked hard to maintain his composure with Elayne, he was finally able to walk back home. It wasn't that he didn't like being with her, but it

simply was... too overwhelming. His heart was beating very fast and he felt like it was going to explode out of his chest at any moment. It was quite the overwhelming feeling that only made him more nervous, although he couldn't help but feel like his heart almost skipped a beat when she hugged and kissed him. It was an expression of closeness that Elayne did to those close to her such as her friend Rita and her daughter.

He wasn't used at all with this kind of treatment. He never thought that being hugged and kissed on the cheek was something that people actually did. After the pandemic of Covid-19 that happened over ten years ago, society was never able to fully recover from the damage caused by the intense lockdowns and the enforcements of social distancing, things like hugging or kissing a friend became something that slowly faded away from society, and basic expressions of closeness were only shared between very close family members now.

However, Elayne was a woman with Mexican family, and her grandmother's culture was always about being close with the people they cared for, family or not, friends were friends, and her grandma always said that friends were like your second family, and that you have to love them and take care of them, so they didn't go away. Due to this, Elayne didn't really care about how society now saw such basic human interactions and was very open, she had never done this with Mark, but she did it out of instinct pretty much. Mark felt overwhelmed by her cuteness and deep down had the urge to hug her back and kiss her as well, but he thought it would be awkward, so he stopped himself.

He caressed his cheek gently as he walked back home, his face was as red as a tomato. Due to his youthful face, he looked like an adorable teenager embarrassed over his crush noticing him.

"I can't believe it... S-She really just kissed me..." He thought aloud.

Mark walked back home without heading back into the minimarket. Instead he jumped into his bed and sighed in relief after he reached it.

"Hahh... I am tired..." He sighed. "T-This is way too much for me."

It could be said that his love for her had just increased in a single day... But who wouldn't in such a situation? Elayne was too good of a woman to be true. If it wasn't because she was already married and had a daughter, way more men would be circling around her like flies. Mark was just one of those men

that didn't care about those things. Hell, he was even willing to become Elena's adoptive father, but that didn't seem to be realistic in the end, as Elena disliked him and seemed to see through his intentions, realizing he wanted more than a friendship from her mother.

He felt a bit embarrassed with himself in that regard, because he made Elayne's daughter think he was just some perverted guy only interested in fucking her mom, while Mark just wanted a love relationship. After all, there was a very bad misconception about all men just wanting to desperately have sex with the woman they're interested with, and although there were many men like this anyways, there were also many that aren't like this. Some people were only seeking love, and Mark was one of such men.

But would Elayne love him back? Well, he didn't lose anything if he tried his best...

"Well... It's 6 PM already... Ugh, I'll take a nap and maybe if I wake up with energy, I'll play a bit." He thought, as he took out his shoes and changed his clothes into some more comfortable ones. Then he rolled on bed and slept over it.

Mark walked away from my house after our lunch, he stayed for a bit more afterwards and we chatted a lot while drinking the nice wine. I had asked him to bring it back with him because it was way too expensive, but he said that I could keep it... Wow, I was very surprised about that, actually! How come he was telling me to keep it?! It was very expensive! But then he told me that it was okay and that we could share it again on another occasion... Geez, I guess he already tied me down to another date? Well, it was nice to have a new friend to distract myself from my daily routine for once.

While drinking wine I really noticed that he was pretty handsome, like really handsome... Was this the alcohol making me feel dizzy? Well, he was indeed a handsome young man... Men my age were often not that pretty, he still had that youthful spark that made him so adorable as well... Ah, what was I even thinking? I shouldn't think such things, I was not some weird perverted old woman that was into younger men! Also, wasn't he like around 25 or something? I was older than him by over ten years! I really sound like some perverted grandma or something... Ugh, being alone for five years really did this to a woman, I should calm myself.

I don't think he's that interested in me, he was doing this mostly out of courtesy, right? Although I was sure that he still liked me as a friend, and that

was for the best. I wouldn't really know what to do if he actually liked me, but I am pretty sure he's closer with Jenny, so he's probably trying to find a way to date her. Although unlike what I thought, he didn't ask me for advice at all... Is he really planning to do it or not? Maybe I should give him some courage next time. He was still young after all, he gotta take the risks while he could! And well, quite honestly, he was not risking anything much.

Although I remembered that he once told me that he had dated coworkers before, but he disliked them afterwards because all of their intentions were always about money and being given raises in the job. They were never truly interested in him romantically, which really sucked. I really hope he didn't see me as one of those people... But I think he didn't because he was very nice to me. He was a good man and I'm sure he deserved a good woman as well, so I hope his love life can receive what he deserved one of these days. I was sure that when he gets a family and has children all of them will be as cute as him, I could even be their nanny...

While washing the dishes, I checked the time and it was around 6 PM and close to 7 PM already... Well, time surely flew by, perhaps we'll just have some instant ramen for dinner I guess? I doubt my daughter and her friend will come out now. If they would, it was probably only to go to the bathroom. They got all the snacks of the world, so they'd probably be going to take breaks between and eat their snacks, so the girls were going to be fine for now. Phew, I really filled up my stomach eating a lot of croquets though, I was full, and there was also that wine... Should I go play the game while being slightly drunk? I think they advised against that... So I should probably take a little nap before that.

I moved back to bed and jumped over it, and then I set an alarm clock for around 8:30 PM and then I dozed off...

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Ding! Ding!

"Uwah! Eh?"

When I woke up, the alarm clock was ringing, it was already dark outside, and I slept a big nap for around two and a half hours... Well that was a long nap, but I used to do this all the time when I didn't have much to do, but now that I got the game, I should play it again. I checked the alcohol levels in my blood, I am still in the moderate, a few cups of wine won't go away with a nap... Nonetheless, I feel way better now and not drunk like before, so I guess I could play the game better for now. However, before I could play, I checked my phone and found some messages from Mark and Rita, my two friends.

[Rita: Hey, Elayne, are you there? How have you been enjoying the game, friend? I'm going to play it next week, what's your char? Race and Job Class? My son felt embarrassed to introduce me to that stuff so I had to research myself, hahah!]

[Rita: I was researching about how to make money quickly on the game, it says that production-based classes are very rare and those make money off selling what they make, but it sounds a bit complicated... Nonetheless, it is better than working outside to be honest.]

[Rita: I also saw one about being a sex worker! Apparently, the game allows for close interactions with those you add as friends, so you could even become some sexy race like an Succubus and have sex for money! And because it is all virtual, it is not real, isn't it? Wow, I wonder how virtual sex feels like, ohohoho~]

Yep, that was Rita, she hasn't changed a single bit. She's really quite a pervert sometimes. Did the first thing she thought about the game was having sex on it? I am pretty sure her husband was still with her! Wouldn't it be like cheating?! Yeah, I hope she was joking around and not for real, but you never knew, this woman had been like this ever since high school.

I decided to answer her right away so she doesn't get weird ideas. I had to stop her before she did anything weird. If she wanted to, I could help her craft stuff or something. Acorn was an Alchemist so he might even help us out in that regard.

[Elayne: Rita don't joke around like that! It would still be like cheating your husband, don't ever think about doing that! I am not letting you! No way! ...Also, my in-game name is Planta, I made a Dryad with the Farmer Job Class because I saw that they can grow a farm and there are various activities that don't relate to fighting, and I really don't like fighting... Although I still have been forced to do it sometimes. But it was still pretty fun! Apparently, each

race has a different spawn place, but we can gather in the Free Market City, where any player can teleport to automatically.]

She was probably busy doing something else because she didn't read the message right away like she often did, so I left her that message and moved towards Mark's messages. He seemed to have left something small...

[Mark: Thanks for inviting me to eat today, it was very fun, and your cooking is amazing, Elayne. I am looking forward to eating again with you one of these days so we can finish off that wine. I hope you don't drink it until then...]

I guess it was a very polite message, I should leave him something short as well to not annoy him that much.

[Elayne: Okay! Thank you, Mark! Good night!]

That should be enough! I had never been that much into chatting online, I really just preferred to talk with people in person, but that nowadays made me someone very rare, huh? Well, for now, I should log into the game again, I think I was Level 4, and I have yet to check my Status. I should probably get some new Skills or perhaps level up a few others? I had to think about this a bit more deeply though.

I put on the VR headset and then dived into the game... I don't think I'll play that much longer though. I liked to sleep early.

Chapter 24: A Random Boss Has Appeared!

I logged back to the game and I found myself seated inside of the Chief of the Squirrel-kin's house and there was also Acorn napping over a small bed made of hay. He had almost a dozen flasks filled with a green liquid sitting at a table at his side. He seemed to have taken a nap seeing how I wasn't coming back yet, I was so sorry! I also took a nap, and I was quite tired...

I then looked into the current quest and saw that we still needed a bunch of materials, although at the very least we got the mushroom part done for.

[Dark Essence]: 1/10

[Black Core]: 1/10

[Morning Flower Dew]: 0/5

[Spiky Purple Mushroom]: 5/5

[Leaf of Youth]: 0/5

[Golden Sap]: 0/5

Damn it... At the very least we got to get something of this bunch today! I knew that Acorn was the only one aware of the way to all these materials, so I had to sadly wake him up. The big squirrel boy looked so cute sleeping, I ended caressing him for a bit. His fur was so soft, I wanted to adopt him! But he was an NPC friend, not a pet that I could just go around petting! So with that in mind, I stopped having these weird thoughts where I wanted to make Acorn my little pet and slowly attempted to wake him up by shaking him a little bit.

"Acorn, wake up... I am back," I said. "Dear, wake up..."

"Hmm..." He muttered. "F-Five more minutes, grandma..."

Aw... I guess his grandma used to wake him up early in the morning? He must miss her a lot... Was his grandma like his mother? I haven't seen him talking about his parents at all, were they alive? Well, it would be rude to ask, so I have not asked those types of things that might be hurtful.

"Hmnggh... Oh? Ah!"

Acorn finally woke up after I caressed his head with a bit more intensity. He jumped out of the bed made of hay as he realized I was standing there looking down at him. He quickly regained his composure as he licked his tiny hands and washed his face with them... I guess that was how squirrels do it.

"Phew... Sorry for that, I was taking a nap to regain some energies! I think there's still time to go look for some stuff, right?" He checked out his window and saw that the sun was still in the sky, just slowly going down.

"Yeah, it still should be enough time, so what should we go pick now?" I asked. "Anything closer to here aside from the mushrooms?"

"I think we almost extinguished all the mushrooms from that area..." He sighed. "Mushroom monsters come from an underground cave or something,

but they take a long time growing up into adults and then sprouting out of the ground, so I guess we are mostly free from those guys for a while."

"Eeh? No more mushrooms? Oh well, I got a lot of dropped items from them, enough mushrooms to cook for a month or more," I said with a smile.

"Well that's good," said Acorn. "Anyways, the closest item we got is the Golden Sap, it is the sap of a specific tree named Ash Tree of Life, it is a small tree said to have grown from a small branch of the Yggdrasil Tree. Just like the Tree of Beginnings! There is a small family of Ash Trees of Life to the northwest, so let's go there, it should be a short trip if we go on top of Belle!"

"Meee!"

Belle was right at our side, as she was also napping with Acorn. Loki was seemingly sleeping too as she remained quiet near Belle... I didn't know if plants slept or not, but I think they do? Well, Loki was a monster plant so normal rules don't exactly apply to her as we know it. Nonetheless, with that said, we decided to move out. I took a peek at each citizen before we went out. Most of them were back to sleep, but looking at their status, they seemed healthier, so that soothed my heart. I guess they'd be able to endure it more.

Just wait for us, we'll surely find the materials and create a cure!

We moved down the tree into the grassy forest floor below, and we mounted our fierce steed. Belle was strong enough to carry all three of us (including Loki) without any apparent problems, she quickly marched towards the destination that Acorn told me. I was able to indicate Belle where to run by clicking into a certain point in the mini map.

The sound of her legs crushing branches and the grass below was heard everywhere as we moved forward, but it seemed that monsters were not near so we were kind of safe... and Belle would crush anything that got in the way anyways. For around twenty minutes, we simply moved as fast as possible towards our location. The beautiful forest was getting a bit darker now, but I was willing to work at night to get what we wanted.

"Here we are!"

After half an hour, we arrived at our destination and we found ourselves in a small patch of grass in the forest, which was separated from the rest of the forest for some reason. In the middle of this patch of grass, this small area,

there were a few dozen small Ash Trees, with gray-colored branches with green leaves, emanating a mysterious aura from within.

"We are here! It seems that there were no monsters, that's nice to know," said Acorn, as he jumped into the forest at first and began to move towards the Ash Trees at a fast speed. As he moved, I decided to follow him with Belle and Loki at my side. I looked around but it seemed that there was nothing dangerous so it would be a nice and safe trip, that's nice—Eh?

However, before my eyes, a creeping and large shadow was slowly lurking right at the side of Acorn, coming directly from the depths of the forest, and then, it jumped right towards us!

"Watch out, Acorn!" I cried, as I extended my hands and suddenly shaped them as vines, grabbing Acorn and pulling him back before the enormous creature was to crush him!

BOOOOMMM!!!

The creature was so heavy it made the entire ground tremble, and it blew us away with ease. I ended up falling over my own butt, which was rather big thankfully, and I caught Acorn on my arms. I lost some HP, but it was regenerating automatically.

"GYU!"

The angered and... cute (?) voice of a creature was heard. I looked at the entity made of darkness... that was definitely a Dark Beast! But what kind of Dark Beast is that? It had the shape of... a mushroom?! When I looked at the beast information, something intriguing showed up...

[Dark Beast Mushroom King: Lv7 (ELITE)]

A powerful Dark Beast formed from the leftover negative energy and miasma contained from dozens of Walking Mushrooms that were indiscriminately massacred all at once. It is filled with resentment and will chase down those that killed the mushrooms that gave birth to it at all costs. It possesses a deadly venomous pore that can paralyze and inflict poison on a target, which will lower their HP over time, it can also jump very high and crush an enemy with its big weight.

What? It was the mushroom we killed yesterday?! No way, is this all my fault? Uagh! It was because I summoned Belle and she just killed everybody... I am sorry, mushrooms! Have they come to haunt me now that we assassinated them?! Ugh... And its HP bar was so big! It was definitely a Boss Monster! What kind of game was this where they make a Boss Monster chase you down? It was as if the game just wanted you to die for once...

"T-That's a big Dark Beast! And a mushroom?!" asked Acorn.

"I can sense it, Acorn, this Dark Beast was born from the miasma that the mushrooms we killed yesterday had..." I sighed. "It is all my fault!"

"N-No, don't think about those things, please!" he said. "W-We have to kill it now, if we run away, it will chase us down into the village and if this thing can jump so high, it could even destroy all the houses in the trees—Uwah! It's coming again!"

"GYUUU!"

The giant Dark Beast Mushroom King suddenly gathered a large quantity of energy in the form of darkness within its body. The energy concentrated within its tiny legs and then the mushroom jumped high into the skies once more with an explosion of this dark matter, leaving a lot of dark smoke behind!

FLAAAASH!

"It is falling, run!" I cried, grabbing Acorn as Belle and Loki followed me from behind and then, the giant mushroom fell right over the place we were just a few seconds ago!

BOOOOOOMMMM!!!

The enormous tremor it provoked was very loud and strong, and it even cracked the dirt and stones behind, leaving a large crater where the Mushroom had to crawl out of it for a bit—Wait, that's it! Was this... a Boss Pattern? So even in this game they got something like that? Every time it fell, it created a small pit that it had to crawl outside from, giving us time to hit it!

"Acorn, hit it with everything you got!" I said. I quickly decided to attack myself. I didn't have many attack skills or anything of the sort, Green Magic seems purely defensive or supportive, but that's enough! I used the Buffing Spells Accelerated Growth, and Verdant Recovery Light, which both gave a slight

buff to a target, and I conjured it on both of us and Belle and Loki! After that, I slowly shaped my hand into a large and sharp spear made out of wood, hardening the wood was hard and it took a chunk of MP, but I didn't have much of an option now! Controlling the trees was unrealistic because they were far away and would cost too much MP.

"Okay! I prepared these explosive potions just for the occasion!" he said.

"E-Explosive potions?!" I asked.

Acorn took out a small red flask from his pocket, containing a strange red liquid that glowed very brightly. It seemed to emanate the aura of fire and combustion! This was definitely not a potion! Was this a Molotov bomb but in a fantasy world?!

"I made them out of a special herb that has a sap that combusts when it touches another specific sap, this black one! This is Fiery Sap and this is Oil!" said Acorn.

"Acorn that's not a sap—Well, whatever, try it out then!" I said.

"Okay!"

As we moved around, Acorn quickly threw both of the flasks over the head of the angered Dark Best Mushroom King, as the flasks shattered into pieces over its head. The black oil mixed with the "fiery sap" and then, a combustion effect happened, an explosion of fire, actually!

BOOOM!!!

"W-Wow, it worked! Hahah!" Laughed Acorn. "This is the first time I try this out!"

"GYUUUUU...!"

The giant mushroom began to burn, constantly taking damage on its HP, as it now gained the Status of "Burning" and was taking constant damage! Nice! Although the damage by itself was not as big, as it lowered around 7% of its HP, it was a good chunk nonetheless!

"GYU! GYU!"

However, the mushroom only grew angrier at our attempt at damaging it, as it finally jumped into the skies once more! It began to quickly fall towards our exact direction with amazing precision. I quickly jumped over Belle once I grabbed Acorn, as Loki followed next, and then Belle moved us away in time.

BOOOOOMMM!!!

Another tremor happened, but the Mushroom not only just jumped this time—instead it angrily released a purple-colored smoke all around its body! These were the poisonous spores!

Chapter 25: A Mighty Boss Battle!

The Dark Beast Mushroom King hit the ground, generating a loud tremor that almost threw us off-balance, and the second after, its mouth opened and it began to release a poisonous smoke, which were actually its spores. The mushroom had decided that it would be better to poison us to death! I might be a player and can die and revive, but Acorn is an NPC, and it is said that when NPC happen to die sometimes, they can't revive! So, I cannot let him die in front of me, I have to make sure he lives.

"Acorn! Pull back!" I stepped back with Belle and Acorn was almost caught in the poisonous smoke if it wasn't because I grabbed him in the last moment. I desperately tried to attack the mushroom to stop making it do this attack, pointing my whole wooden spear-arm and then detaching it from my body and firing it as a projectile! The spear flew quickly out of my body, I felt a slight and near-numb pain, and my entire arm was gone, but the spear of wood reached its target accurately, and hit the mushroom in the head.

CLAAASH!

"GYUUU...!"

The mushroom groaned in agony with its cute-sounding voice, which only made it more eerie to confront, as it began to feel dizzy and tried to take out the spear from its head, but the small arms it had couldn't reach the spear atop his head, and the damage of the fire and the spear piercing its body only made it slowly lose more and more HP! Alongside that, the first impact of my attack dealt around 15% of its HP in a single blow, that's insane!

However, my own HP also took a big hit, detaching my body parts and firing them costs me HP, and that time I threw off my entire arm, so I lost a whopping 40 HP! I desperately conjured Verdant Recovery Light on my lost arm and slowly regrew it... into a new wooden spear, of course! My HP and MP regeneration was pretty insane within the forest thanks to my various passive skills, so my HP was back up to normal in just half a minute since I fired the first wooden spear.

"W-Wow, that attack was awesome!" Said Acorn. "L-Let me attack as well!"

Acorn suddenly climbed one of the trees at the border of this patch of grass in the middle of the forest and took out two flasks of liquid from his Item Bag, throwing them over the mushroom that was still struggling to get out of the pit it created by itself.

CRASH!

FLUOOSH!

The flasks shattered into pieces over the cap of the mushroom, as both liquids came into contact and reacted with one another, generating an explosion of flames that once more started to consume the mushroom's body, the flames slowly began to diminish its HP, but it wasn't going to go down with that alone, the flames from the previous attack only lasted a few seconds after all.

"How many of those do you got left, Acorn?" I asked.

"A-Around three more..." He said.

"Do you got healing potions?" I asked desperately.

"Yes, here! Have four!" Said Acorn, throwing four flasks towards me which I caught by extending my hands into a net made of vines, that cost around 60 MP, surprisingly. I caught the flasks, and for a moment thought about putting them inside my Inventory, but that would be bad because I would have to constantly open it to take the flasks, which takes time! So I stuck them between my breasts.

I commanded Belle and Loki to stand by and guard Acorn, if they get closer to the mushroom to attack, they'll get poisoned, which is bad, this thing cannot be fought from close-range sadly, so Belle who is a fan of that would only end

up dying from poison, and Loki too. Plants are also weak to poison-type, and she's not a poison-type plant so she's not immune to it or something.

"GYUUUU!"

The Mushroom decided to finally jump, after managing to crawl out of the hole, it gathered dark energies and then jumped high into the skies, slowly falling down right towards my direction!

BOOOOOMMM!!!

I managed to escape by jumping away, but the mushroom was tricky this time, it quickly unleashed its poisonous spore smoke all over my back while I was running away, quickly intoxicating me and inflicting the Poisoned Negative Status Effect, what a pain!

I put myself back up together and used my own body shapeshifting once again, pointing my left arm at the mushroom and firing yet another powerful wooden spear. The spear flew through the wind, impacting the mushroom in just a second after being fired!

CLAASH!

"GYEE...!"

The Mushroom was now down to less than 50% HP! I quickly drank a flask of potion made by Acorn and then generated another new wooden spear, firing another one for a second time!

CLAASH!

"GYUU...!"

The Dark Beast Mushroom King left out an agonizing cry, as it got angrier than ever, its eyes grew redder and it suddenly gathered darkness atop its cap! Suddenly, a large sphere of darkness formed, and it was fired directly at me!

"Wood Shield! Wood Shield! Wood Shield!!!"

TRUUM! TRUUM! TRUUM!

I desperately conjured the Wood Shield Spell, as three thick shields made of hardened wood emerged one after another in front of me, protecting me from the sphere of darkness which impacted and destroyed the first two like nothing, but having lost its speed and force from hitting them, the third managed to block it before it exploded into black smoke.

BOOOOMMM!!!

"GYUU...!"

The Mushroom seemed tired, and it was surprised when it saw that I have actually managed to survive, it got even angrier, so it fired a deadly sphere of darkness directly towards me as fast as possible! The sphere of darkness flew towards my direction, trying to crush me once more! Does this thing has infinite MP or something?!

BOOOOMMM!!!

The sphere of darkness clashed over the floor as I managed to jump away barely by shaping my legs as spring-like branches and jumping several meters into the distance like a rabbit would.

CLASH!

I fell pretty badly though, as I lost 20 HP by just falling into the floor. Ouch! I took out another flask and drank it desperately, while I heard the angry sounds of a brave squirrel child.

"You bastard! Take this! Triple Explosion!"

CRAASH!

Acorn suddenly threw six flasks, three containing red liquid and three containing black liquid as all the flasks shattered over the head of the mushroom, and the sheer amount of oil and combustion liquid made up for a loud explosion!

BOOOOMMM!

"GYUUUUUUUU!"

The Mushroom was greatly surprised and impacted by the explosion; its HP was already below 20%! It was time to finish off this bad boy once and for all! I

pointed out my arm at it- no, my two arms, and shaped them as wooden spears, firing both of them at the same time! The spears flew through the wind, piercing the mushroom's face a second after being fired!

CLAAAAAASH!

"GRRYYYUUUU...!"

The mushroom quickly lost all of its HP with my double attack, as its HP Bar quickly began to deplete to zero! The Dark Beast Mushroom King slowly began to dissipate, as its entire body exploded into black smoke, leaving behind item icons that flew towards me and were stored inside my inventory.

Ding!

[You defeated the [Dark Beast Mushroom King: Lv7 (ELITE)]!

[You gained 2500 Gold!]

[You acquired the [Dark Essence] x3, [Black Core] x3, and [Mushroom King Soul] x1 Items!]

[You gained 3500 EXP!]

[Your Race and Job Level has increased from Level 4 to Level 5!]

[All Your Stats have increased!]

[You gained Skill Points and Stat Points]

[You acquire the Title of [Big Game Slayer]]!

[Loki] Level has increased from Level 1 to Level 3!]

[Loki] has learned the [Vine Attack: Lv1] Skill!]

[Belle] Level has increased from Level 2 to Level 4!]

[Belle] has learned the [Aura Attack: Lv1] Skill!]

[Big Game Slayer]

Acquisition Conditions: Defeat a Boss-type Monster.

Equip Bonus: +50 HP, +50 MP, +20 All Stats

A Title given to a brave player capable of defeating a Boss-type Monster! It can be done alone or with a party. You have proven your courage as a warrior and you've managed to defeat one of the menaces of this world, the gods are cheering for you!

Oh wow! I acquired a new Title too! And it has some nice bonuses compared to the other two I had previously... I guess killing monsters is really the way to progress better in this game... Although I cannot say I had a good time with this. At the very least I ended up not consuming all the potions, there were two left, which I quickly gave back to Acorn.

"W-Well... That was tiring..." He sighed. "I saw my life go through my eyes back then."

"Yeah... I want to go to sleep..." I sighed. "This was quite too tiring for me."

"That was incredible though, I never thought that you could do such a thing as firing wooden spears so precisely!" He said. "I never thought that Dryads could do such a thing!"

"M-Me neither, but I seem to have the power to shape my body into any sort of plant... So I just thought about something long and sharp that can pierce through things with strength, and my arm magically covered itself with wood and shaped itself very sharply." I said.

"Incredible..." Said Acorn, as if his admiration for me grew more.

After that, we moved to gather the sap, which came out of these trees. Acorn took out a knife and began to carve the wood one of the biggest trees, until suddenly, large quantities of sweet and golden-colored sap began to come out like a literal river! Acorn quickly filled five bottles with it and then I closed the tree wound with Plant Manipulation, regrowing the wood back over the wound. Trees are living beings, so of course they get wounds, it is important to heal them as the spirit of the forest!

"And done... We cannot abuse this too much, taking out too much from this sap would kill the tree because this sap is like a tree's blood after all, thank you for healing it for me..." Said Acorn. "And thank you for giving us some of your sap, sir tree!"

Acorn petted the tree respectfully, it seems that the people that lived in this forest was very respectful of life and treated trees as sacred living beings which they had to respect for the things they gave out, they were venerated.

We mounted over Belle and then, we moved back to the village, where Acorn stored the items, we have gathered until now inside of my Inventory where they could be kept secure, according to him.

And after that, we decided to have a small dinner to fill up our satiation meters, which were plummeting to almost 20, we were really exhausted and very hungry! There was a lot of fish left from the big Pike, so I decided to cook some fried fish fillets and made a small fish stew with mushrooms and acorns, we also decided to use some of the sap and made tea with it, it was very tasty!

[You cooked [Blue Pike Fish Fillets]!]

[You cooked [Blue Pike Small Stew]!]

[You gained 100 EXP]

[You gained 200 EXP]

Ah, sweet, I even gained some little EXP out of it, how nice.

Now, to the important part! While enjoying the food with Acorn who was also reading through a book rather concentratedly, I looked into my Status.

[Player Name]: [Planta]

[Race]: [Dryad: Lv5/30]

[Race EXP]: [600/5000]

[Job Class]: [Farmer: Lv5/20]

[Job Class EXP]: [600/5000]

[Satiation]: [100/100]

[HP]: [90/90 -> 130/130]

[MP]: [370/370 -> 390/390 -> 490/490]

[STR]: [22 -> 32]

[VIT]: [22 -> 32]

[DEX]: [22 -> 32]

[AGI]: [40 -> 64]

[INT]: [59 -> 83]

[WIS]: [60 -> 80]

[LUC]: [40 -> 50]

[Race Skills: 6/10]

[Spirit of the Forest: Lv1], [Photosynthesis: Lv1], [Green Magic: Lv2], [Life Drain: Lv1], [Plant Companion: Lv1], [Daughter of Nature: Lv1]

[Job Class Skills: 6/10]

[Agriculture: Lv1], [AGI UP: Lv1], [Tame: Lv1], [Cooking: Lv1], [Farm Animal Companion: Lv1], [Fishing: Lv1]

[Summons: 2/2]

[White Goat (Female): Name: Belle: Lv4], [Carnivorous Amber Lotus Flower: Name: Loki: Lv3]

[Tamed Monsters: 0/2]

None

[Skill Points: 24]

[Stat Points: 20]

[Equipment]

[Spirit of the Forest Robes]

[Bracelet of Nature]

[Crown of Spirit Wood]

[Seed Pouch]

I had gained a nice amount of Stats! And it seems that because I didn't look into my Status before it shows the increase from my level up from Level 3 to Level 4 as well, how sweet. Now, should I spend some of these Points I got? What Skill should I get now? Or should I level up some? I wonder what doesn't cost a lot of MP even if high leveled... It wasn't that recommended to max out Skills early on because their full capacity cannot be achieved with low stats and low MP, so it would be a waste, Skill Points must be spent wisely!