

Chapter 5: Meeting The Squirrel-folk Alchemist

Phew, that was quite close, we almost didn't make it. I had to use almost all my Mana to kill that thing! Plant Manipulations was not the spell that I can use consecutively, that was for sure... Maybe if I run out of Mana, I'll have to use other attacks.

For now, however, I had twenty Mana Potions and Health Potions inside my inventory,. When I checked them, they each indicated that they'd recover 200 HP and MP respectively, so I could drink one of these potions and get back all the Mana I lost...

But the thing was... I didn't know where I could even buy any more Mana Potions! I only got twenty and twenty of the Mana and Health Potions, but there didn't seem to be any shops around that sold them ...Wait, could this village sell them?

Well, due to this scarcity, I didn't want to waste them for now until I was in a very dire situation. The guide spirit told me that Mana regenerated every second by a little bit, depending on my INT and WIS stats, the natural regeneration increases.

"T-Thank you so much for killing that thing, Lady Dryad..." said the tiny squirrel-folk boy.

"Don't worry, it is my duty as the forest's spirit to help those inside the forest! ...Or so said the Tree." I said. "Anyways, what's your name?"

"M-My name? Ah... My name's Acorn, nice to meet you, Lady Dryad! What's your name?" he asked.

"Acorn?! Is that really your name? Oh my god, it really fits you!" I said. "My name is Elay- I mean, Planta..."

"Oh, Lady Planta then! Were you really sent by the Tree of the Beginning? This is big news... A Dryad would certainly be able to help us recover from the disease..." said the boy.

"Yeah, I am here for that... So... What should I do?" I wondered. "Do I use my Green Magic?"

"G-Green Magic? I don't know if that would work... Anyways, let me guide you to the Elder, he's still somehow hanging out, even after many of our people have already passed away... He said he knows something about how to cure it, but there is nobody to help us gather the materials..." sighed the boy.

"What about you? You seem healthy." I said.

"B-But I am weak..." he sighed.

"Ah... Well, very well then, guide me there dear." I said.

"Understood!"

The little one-meter big squirrel led me through the branches, as I slowly walked behind him. On the way, I made sure to check every little house I came across, finding the squirrel-folk sleeping over their beds, many had strong fevers and were coughing a lot, they were all in terrible conditions.

Were they really NPC? Because I really felt bad for them now... Why did developers make their creations suffer so much?

"They all seem sick, many of them might be on the verge of dying... We really need to do something urgent..." said the guide spirit.

"Geez, maybe I won't be able to log out in a while..." I sighed. "Ah! H-How much time has passed?"

"This is not like those weird fictional stories about VR games, the same time happens from both the game and inside, so an hour outside is an hour inside of here, and you've been playing for... around three hours and twenty minutes." Said the guide spirit.

"Oh no! T-That's a long time! I began playing around 2 PM so it's around 5 PM now? Geez... I guess I ended up skipping lunch." I sighed.

"Hm, well, it is not good that you play too much, maybe you should log out, grab something to eat, and log in again." Said the guide. "It is bad to overexert yourself."

"Okay... I will after I talk with the Elder then, thank you for worrying about me, I thought you were just a mean guide, but you're very nice." I said, as I petted the little light bulb.

"T-That's... Well, it is my duty..." he said shyly.

"Here, Lady Dryad!"

Acorn led me to a larger than usual house, as I entered, I found small stairs that led up. It was something which Acorn began to climb dexterously while I had to slowly climb because they were too small for me.

When I reached the second floor, I found a very old-looking squirrel man dressed in a long blue hat over a bed, most of his hair was gray, and his eyes seemed weakened, his breathing was slow.

"Hmm... Ah... A-Acorn?"

The squirrel grandpa looked at Acorn with a weak gaze, he seemed to be barely able to see by now. Was this because he's old or because of the disease?

"E-Elder! The Tree of the Beginning sent a Forest Spirit, a Dryad! She said she was sent here to help us recover..." said Acorn.

The Elder's eyes opened wide and I was able to see that they were completely white, he had no pupils... Was he blind? He wasn't able to see anything, nor me.

"Ah! R-Really? Lady... Lady Dryad... where are you?" he asked. He grabbed a stick and moved it around, hitting Acorn in the head accidentally.

"Ouch! Elder, don't use that old stick, she's right here!" said Acorn, as he pointed at me.

I moved towards the Elder and held his small squirrel hand covered in gray fur.

"I am here, Elder... Don't worry." I said. "Please, tell me what I must do to help your folk."

"Ah... Such a soothing voice, my Lady Dryad... I... I really thought that Goddess Gaia had forgotten us... To think that she sent one of her daughters here... I am so happy... Please, help us..." he cried.

"I will... Don't cry, cheer up, I will do anything I can," I said. "Acorn told me that you know something that could heal the disease... Is that right?"

"Y-Yes... Hahhh... I had figured out the recipe some time ago, but I was not able to make the potion because I fell ill..." he sighed. "My body has no strength..."

"What recipe is it?" I asked.

"I-It is in the small table over there... A potion named "Miasma Cleansing Potion"..." he said. "Grab that recipe and collect the materials, after that, using an Alchemy Pot down there on the first floor, merge the ingredients and make a potion."

"T-That's easier than I thought!" I said. "So Green Magic won't do?"

"Green Magic is certainly good at healing, but the thing is..." he sighed. "The thing is, the miasma disease is not something that can be cleansed with Green Magic, the forces of nature are rejected by the miasma, only a special toxin produced from the very beasts that form from the miasma can cancel out the effects of the disease... I had researched this for a long time, please, trust me."

"I will, very well then, leave things to me." I said.

"Thank you.... I am very grateful..." he sighed.

I moved towards the table as I left Acorn holding the Elder's hand.

"Grandpa... We'll do everything we can to heal you and the people..." he cried. "So make sure to not die until then, okay?"

"O-Okay... My dear Acorn... I-I won't kick the bucket yet! I-I still have some time before... I'm going to meet your grandma..." he sighed.

"I miss her..." cried Acorn.

"I do... too..." sighed the Elder.

It seems that Acorn was the Grandson of the village's elder, and his grandma that died was actually the Elder's wife... Damn, that's harsh.

I looked at the paper, and it even showed drawings of the materials I needed...

For this particular recipe, required the following:

[Dark Essence] x10

[Black Core] x10

[Morning Flower Dew] x5

[Spiky Purple Mushroom] x5

[Leaf of Youth] x5

And... [Golden Sap] x5

These items look complicated to find! How do I even get them?

Ah! I got the first two ingredients necessary and I got one of each by defeating a Dark Beast.

Wait... I needed to defeat nine more to complete the recipe?!

Ugh... They were already strong. I'm not even sure if my battle against one without it being at a disadvantage would be easy.

"Hmm... I can guide you to those items, if you check their descriptions, you can see where they're located and from where they come from." Said the Spirit Guide. "This entire forest is separated into many sections, each one with their own name and special monsters... We have to go in order and pick each item from all around the forest, it's not going to be a short journey..."

"I-I see... Let's go then, we don't have any time to waste, any second lost is a second these people have to endure this..." I said.

"Wait! Hold on, weren't you going to eat lunch? Come on Planta, this is a game at the end, so go eat first." Said the guide.

"B-But..."

"No buts!"

"Okay..."

I ended up being reprimanded by the guide spirit, but before I could log off, Acorn came rushing to my side.

"I-I will help! Even if I am weak... Lady Dryad can protect me... I have other skills that can be useful, so please bring me with you, I know the places where there are Dark Beasts roaming," he said. "And also the places where there are the other ingredients..."

"Ah... But Acorn, dear, you're too young..." I said. "I cannot really... put you in danger..."

"P-Please! I want to help..." he cried. "I... I've always been a burden to everyone... I just want to help..."

"Sigh... Okay... But make sure to stay stuck to me all the time!" I said. "I will do everything I can to protect you, but don't get yourself in trouble either... Alright?"

"O-Okay..." said the little squirrel-folk.

And suddenly, some system windows showed up.

Ding!

[You have befriended the NPC: [Acorn, the Timid Squirrel-folk Boy]!]

[Your Bond Level between you and Acorn have increased]

[You can now bring Acorn with you as a Party Member]

Eh? I added him as my friend? Oh right... there was the possibility of befriending NPCs! I had almost forgotten... So he had his own Skills that can help? He said something like that...

I looked into the boy who stood there.

"S-So we are going?" he asked.

"Erm... Let's wait a tiny bit before that..." I said.

"Okay..."

Acorn sat down while reading the recipe, as I saw his Status. Oh, he actually had one!

[NPC Name]: [Acorn]

[Race]: [Squirrel Folk: Lv3/30]

[Race EXP]: [230/3000]

[Job Class]: [Apothecary: Lv6/20]

[Job Class EXP]: [172/6000]

[Satiation]: [74/100]

[HP]: [60/60]

[MP]: [330/330]

[STR]: [26]

[VIT]: [35]

[DEX]: [45]

[AGI]: [55]

[INT]: [30]

[WIS]: [30]

[LUC]: [40]

[Race Skills: 4/10]

[Beast-folk: Squirrel-kin: Lv2], [Acrobatics: Lv3], [Fur Production: Lv3], [Acorn Shooting: Lv2]

[Job Class Skills: 6/10]

[Alchemy: Lv4], [Synthesis: Lv3], [Appraisal: Lv3], [DEX UP: Lv2], [AGI UP: Lv2], [Crafting: Lv3]

[Equipment]

[Squirrel-folk Tribal Clothes]

[Wood Bracelet]

[Wooden Staff]

[Item Bag]

He really had a nice status for being so small and cute... I even think that he's stronger than me physically, even though I am taller... He even has more HP than me! And he has some peculiar Skills... So Squirrel-kin can even shoot acorns? That's interesting.

"Acorn I will log out for a little bit... So can you wait until I come back? I promise I won't take too long." I said.

"Log... out? What's that?" wondered the squirrel.

"Erm... Ah... It is like... How come an NPC doesn't know that?" I asked.

"NPC?" asked the squirrel as it tilted his head.

"Wait, guide, these people..." I asked and turned to the orb.

"NPC are not aware they're NPC, so please just don't bring it up, they'll always don't know what you're talking about... Just tell him you're going back home for a bit, he'll understand." Said the guide while whispering to my ears.

"O-Okay, I am going home for a bit, so I might end up disappearing, I will come back quickly after I get something done with," I said.

"Okay then. Please take care, Lady Dryad." said the squirrel.

"Aw, you're so cute..." I said. I petted Acorn in the head and gave him a little kiss on the forehead.

"Take care as well," I said.

"A-Are all Dryads this expressive?" he asked a bit embarrassedly.

"Perhaps," I said.

I quickly clicked the "Log Out" button and disappeared from there.

I opened my eyes, and I was once more back to reality.

Phew... That really felt like something else.