Hemirtal-7

"Okay, so now I know why I'd want the tracking spell," James told Barkley after wandering through the woods for what felt like hours. The sun was still high, so no more than one, he figured. He'd found the edge of the area the quest was to happen in, but he hadn't found any sign of a bull yet. "The game gets me to the general area, I have to find the target. You probably have better odds of finding the bull than I do, right?"

Barkley looked up at him.

"Actually…" James trailed off. He brought up his sheet and found Barkley in his list of companions. He tapped it.

> Barkley
> Race, Wolf.
> Description, Brindled fur, blue eyes, wolf
> Advantage: Loyal
> Disadvantage: glutton
> Stat: STR 3 AGI 5 Con 2 CHA 1 MAGic 0
> Module: Hunting
> Skill: Tracking 30
> Skill: biting 14
> Skill: Clawing 12

James eyed the wolf. "You've been holding out on me, Barkley. Letting me do all the work when you are definitely the one for this job. Come on, find the bull for me."

Barkley panted, looking at him.

"Find the bull and there'll be food in it for you?"

The wolf canted its head.

This was a game. The set of commands was probably in the help file, somewhere. But there was a search function.

"How do I give Barkley commands?"

> Companions obey your commands to the best of their abilities. While all companion NPCs understand you, their abilities to interpret your command increase with how intelligent they are.

"Bad use of the word," he told the pop-up window, dismissing it with a wave. "As far as I can tell, Barkley is more intelligent than some people I've dealt with in the real-world." Going by what the help was meant to say, someone like Barkley couldn't decipher what he said, so he needed to be specific.

"Barkley, track the bull."

Barkley canted his head to the other side. How was that not specific enough? Track

and bull were exactly what he needed. Except…

"Barkley, track Ferdinan."

The wolf stood, put its muzzle to the ground, and sniffed, walking around James, then trotted away. James followed.

Was the implication here that every bull in the game had a name? Or that because they were inside the quest area, the qualifiers were more restrictive? Just like he'd been shown where the quest area was, but once inside, it was up to him to figure out how to find his target?

Within minutes, James made out noises of crashing through the underbrush. He opened his mouth to call for Barkley and stopped himself. Would whatever that was hear him? He looked through Barkley's information for commands, but nothing came up. If there was a way to control his companions without talking, he'd have to read the help file.

He moved forward as quietly as he could until he saw movement through the branches. A bunch of little something moving around something larger and brown. The mooing told James at least who one of the shapes was. Barkley had led him to Ferdinan.

He approached and saw the wolf on his belly, staring under the leave. James parted them and watched as half a dozen small lizard-like creatures pulled and pushed on the bull's legs, trying to move it, while it was slowly moving its muzzle through a patch of bright yellow flowers.

He called up the quest

> Quest. Ferdinan is off smelling flowers.
> Anton's bull, Ferdinan, has wandered off, and he needs you to retrieve it for him.
> Reward: 1 Fame, 3 Fresh Bread, Anton's gratitude. System note: NPC behavior will be affected by how a player treats them, or quest rewards. Examples of effects of gratitude or resentment: altering the price of a shop's item or availability of quests.

He looked at the bull smelling the flowers. Someone had gone far too literal in their interpretation of the quest title.

The monsters were no more than a foot in height, mottled green and gray hide, small muzzles with sharp teeth, long fingers with claws. Something between rodents and lizards, James decided. He'd have to fight them to retrieve Ferdinan.

Did the loss of fame on death round up or down? He was still in the tutorial, right? Where would he respawn if he died? He didn't feel like walking all the way back. If this was like other games he'd played, each of the monsters had an agro range. He located the one furthest away from the others and pulled Barkley with him as he moved. The wolf stood and stayed at his side.

The area Ferdinan and the monsters were in wasn't quite a clearing, but just less dense with trees. How close would he need to get? He stepped out of the underbrush and took one careful step toward the monsters.

The one furthest away screeched something and pointed at James, causing the six others to turn and join in the screeching before running at him. He cursed, there went one gaming preconception he'd often taken advantage of in games.

He swung at the first and missed. He swung and almost hit Barkley, who'd jumped in the fray, then ran after two fleeing.

James cursed as he swung and missed, while his health bar kept flashing each time one of the monsters swiped at him. Two of the areas looked to be losing noticeable parts each time he felt contact.

The sword cut one in half as one of the bars reached the halfway mark. "Barkley!" James called, and he ran away. The monsters chased after him after a second and gained. James cursed. His skill was nowhere near high enough to win this.

A moo caused the monsters to shriek, and James looked over his shoulder. Ferdinan was walking toward another patch of flowers and the monsters weren't happy about it, abandoning him to run after it. He slowed, then stopped. He jumped when he felt pressure on his leg and almost brought the sword down on Barkley.

"Tell me you killed at least one of them. Was your problem killing bunnies part of how the quest worked, or are you a bad hunter?" He sheathed the sword and looked at his legs. His pants were cut up, but underneath there was no blood, the places where he'd felt the claws being white lines, the discoloration he'd seen on people with ugly scars. Here, though, it was just an indication he'd been cut a few times.

He brought up his character, and next to his legs was the hit-point bar for each. His left leg had four out of ten left, his right five. His arms had ten hit-points each, his torso forty, and his head twenty.

"Armor, Barkley. I need armor. Or to raise my hit-points. What stat controls my hit-points?"

> Hit-points are controlled by your Constitution. Players start with 100 hit-points, distributed between the: head, torso, left arm, right arm, left leg, right leg in this way. 20, 40, 10, 10, 10, 10. Each point a player places in their Constitution gives them an extra 100 hit-points, distributed in the same way. The full loss of hit-points in the head and torso means death, while in the arms and legs means the incapacitation of the limb, as well as debuffs, gained based on how the damage was incurred.

"Of a lot of constitution." He took out one of the cooked rabbit meat.

> Cooked Rabbit Meat
> Cooked meat is one of the most basic foods after raw fruits and vegetables and heals ten hit-points.

"How is healing applied?"

Healing, select categories
Food
Herbs
Magic
Skill

"Food."

Healing through Food
Anytime you eat food, you will heal some or all of your injuries. The more advanced the food preparation is, the more it will heal, as well as providing buffs based on the ingredients used (see herbs for a list of buffs each ingredients grants) the healed points are distributed by the severity of the loss, based on the ratio compared to the whole. The largest ratio will get the most of the points until they are even with the next largest, at which point they will be distributed between the two and so on until the player is fully healed, to the number of heal points has been exhausted.

"Someone had to tell whoever wrote this about the clarity in language laws."
Barkley canted its head.
"No, that's not a thing, fortunately for me. My job would be a lot tougher at times if I couldn't confuse people with legal-sounding jargon." He ate the piece of meat and watched the two bars filled.
He brought up his combat log and looked at a few of the entries

William attacks Gremlins with One-Handed Sword (1+Roll 1)
Gremlin Dodge (10+Roll 8)
William Misses

Gremlin attacks William with claws (15+Roll 7)
William Dodge (0+Roll 6)
Gremlin hits William for 1 point of damage to the right leg

William attacks Gremlins with One-Handed Sword (1+Roll 9)
Gremlin Dodge (10+Roll 17)
William Misses

Gremlin attacks William with claws (15+Roll 1)
William Dodge (0+Roll 7)
Gremlin hits William for 1 point of damage to the right leg

"This isn't pretty, Barkley, but at least it's only one hit-points each time. If I could get them to strike my chest, I'd have the time to get a hit in, hopefully." One entry caught his attention.

> William attacks Gremlins with One-Handed Sword (2+Roll 12)
> Gremlin Dodge (10+Roll 1)
> William hits Gremlin for 3 points of damage, Gremlin dies. You've been awarded 1 Gremlin Meat and 1 Gremlin twine.

He looked at his skills, saw his sword skill had indeed gone up a level, and on top of that, he'd gained his first level in tracking. "Looks like having to track you and trying to track Ferdinan has paid off." Should he change the settings so he'd know when a skill increased? Did he need to know? It wasn't like he needed to do anything for the change to take effect.

He stood. "So, are you ready to try this again?"

Barkley stood with him.

He found Ferdinan with the Gremlins trying to pull it… where? If he did nothing, would they just remain like this, or had the game some sort of escalation? Consequences for not even trying to complete it? Until the gremlins behaved against his expectations, he would have said this would be static, but now? For as not as advanced as the farmer could have been, the gremlins seemed to have more combat savvy than expected.

James stepped out of the bush and wasn't subtle. He ran for the gremlins as they ran for him, meeting them halfway.

He slashed at the first one, then neatly dodged the next's attack while Barkley jumped on two, biting one half and the last two got their claws into one of Jame's legs each. He slashed, missing, and got two more points of damage in return. He killed another, avoided the last one's claws, then took a point of damage, before cutting it into two.

Surprised at having won with only a few points of damage, James looked around. No other monsters. Keeping in mind there might be the one that Barkley ran after still running around, he searched one gremlin and was surprised he didn't receive a prompt to collect the loot. Monsters always dropped loot. It was a standard in all games. Experience and loot.

Except this game didn't use experience. Did this mean it didn't use loot either? It couldn't be.

Barkley returned and sat before him, looking expectant. "What is it, Barkley?" the hungry tag appeared over the wolf, more yellow than green. James chuckled and opened his inventory. "Okay, you definitely deserve a treat if you killed both gremlins." He frowned at the content. On top of his cooked mean and patch of rabbit fur, he had two new stacks with seven items each.

> Gremlin Meat
> A small chunk of not particularly appealing raw meat. Who knows, maybe if it's cooked properly it might be edible?

Gremlin Twine
Gremlins are known for being somewhat crafty and will make small items from whatever they find. Maybe these could be valuable to someone?

Seven. That was how many gremlins there had been. Only he hadn't killed all of them. Barkley had killed three, and he had no idea where the bodies were. This meant that not only did loot appeared directly in his inventory, but somehow whatever Barkley killed, came to him. He so wanted to sit down and read the entire help file to figure out how this game worked, but he didn't have the time.

James hated time crunches.

He gave the wolf two of the chunks. "Stay there, Barkley. I don't want you to spook the bull."

Ferdinan was still smelling flowers, these bright blue. It had a large collar around its neck and James took it. "Hey, Ferdinan." He pulled lightly. "It's time to come home. Anton's getting worried about you." The bull followed his instructions, and as James realized he had no idea how to get back to the farm, he noticed the green beam of light shining in the distance.

"Come on Barkley, our reward is calling." The wolf trotted to his side and Ferdinan didn't seem to notice.