

Hemirtal-9

Shimmerland didn't have a wall, the way a lot of the towns in medieval-themed games James had played had, but it had sentries. Two guards on each side of the road that entered the town. They wore leather armor, held a spear and a sword at their belt.

"Greeting Stranger," the guard on the right called, "Welcome to Shimmerland." The man needed a shave.

"Greeting," James replied, offering his hand. "It's good to be here. It's a long walk from Stormborough. I'm William Cobbler."

"That it is," the man replied without responding to the offered hand. "I'm Aaron."

"And what do you do, Aaron? Other than protecting the town?"

Quest Update: It's time to get social.

Get to know the people of Shimmerland, 2 out of 5

Help the people of Shimmerland, 1 out of 5

He dismissed the message.

"I patrol the area around the Shimmerland."

Insight use failed.

He looked at the other guard who had yet to acknowledge James' existence and thought *use insight*

Insight use successful.

Harry the guard wants to be rich.

Good to know, James thought as he returned his attention to Aaron. "I see you have a sword. I think I could be a good addition to the guard, but I don't know how to use one. What do you think about teaching me?"

William uses Persuasion (17 + roll 7)

Anton Resists (Base Will 15 + action not within the NPC's capability 99 + roll 4)

Aaron wins.

"I can't do that."

James nodded. Did the ninety-nine represent an impossibility to win, or was it a very high bonus to make it nearly impossible to win?

"Alright, then, how about giving me your sword so I can train by myself?"

William uses Persuasion (17 + roll 4)

Anton Resists (Base Will 15 + action against job requirement 25 + roll 3)

Anton wins.

“I can’t—”

James raised his hand. “Hold that thought.” He went into the settings and deactivated the conflict resolution message for his social skills. He had a sense of how it works. He didn’t need to constantly see the numbers. He had his skill, they had a resistance, there was a modifier based on if he went against their motivations or job, or possibly other things, and he probably would get a bonus if he could frame it within what they wanted, and there was some form of randomness. “You’re good to go,” he told Aaron.

“—do that, I need it to keep the town safe.”

James nodded. Did he want to figure out what quest this guard gave? It would probably be some monster-killing quest and if he was going to take that, he needed to be better at fighting first.

“Is there someone in town that can teach me how to use a sword?”

“The weapon master, Charles, can teach all types of weapons. You can find him at the training ground, next to the barracks.”

“And how do I reach the barracks?”

“Just follow the edge of the town past the west road, and you’ll find it there.”

“And west is...?”

Aaron pointed to James’s left.

“Thanks. Oh, I need to set my respawn point, the message said I do that in the town center, where is it?”

“Just follow the road into town until you reach the central square where it meets with the other roads in and out of it. When you see the Hero’s Statue, you’ll be there.”

“Thanks.” James almost left then, then looked the guard over. He didn’t think it mattered, but they seemed to be of similar size, so he practiced his persuasion skill by trying to get him to hand over each part of his armor. He failed at all of them and didn’t raise his skill either. He needed to figure out the system for raising his skills through using them.

The town was larger than he expected. It took him close to ten minutes to reach the center. The buildings were in good condition, which he quickly realized meant nothing, since they were only graphics. They could look like anything the designers wanted.

People moved about, townsfolk going about their business, and to test the level of interactivity, he interrupted a woman carrying a bucket of water and offered to help her.

Quest Update: It’s time to get social.

Get to know the people of Shimmerland, 3 out of 5

Help the people of Shimmerland, 2 out of 5

James knew when he reached the town center. As Aaron the guard said, there was a

statue there of a Hero in the middle of it, on a plinth over a basin with cascading water from around the plinth, filling it.

The craftsmanship of the statue was impressive, and he had to remind himself no one had made it. It was just another graphic created by a designer, but still, it reminded him of how good the VR was. Walking around, he found a plaque on the edge of the basin.

The Hero of Shimmerland.
Hendrick. He gave his life to protect us.

James looked up in surprise. That was Anton's son? He'd have expected more pride. He ran a finger over the plaque. But then again—

You do not have a spawn point set. Do you wish to set Shimmerland Town Center as your respawn point?
System note: respawn points can be reset anytime the criteria are met.
Respawn points can be unbound at any time, but will then default spawn point set when entering the Hemirtal.

“Yes.” He wished messages could wait until he was done thinking before popping up. He stood and looked to this left. A large road was there, as Aaron said. He looked around at the people. Based on the woman with the water bucket, he could easily complete his social quest by talking and offering to help them. It didn't even have to be a quest.

Skill first. He headed down the west road.

And he couldn't help himself. He greeted everyone he met, introducing himself as William Cobbler from Stormborough. Everyone was friendly; and trying to persuade each of giving him something, he ended up with a few bunches of flowers, more bread, a shirt, a skirt, moccasins, and two skill points.

He left everything but the bread on a bench by the training grounds. Bread seemed to be the principal thing the people here ate.

The man standing among the training dummies was stocky, in leather armor like the other guards, but it was in better condition.

“Greetings,” James called, and the man turned.

“Greetings, stranger. Welcome to the Shimmerland training grounds. I'm Charles. What can I do for you?”

James offered his hand. “I'm William Cobbler, from Stromborough.” The man didn't seem to notice the hand, and James dropped it. Were handshakes not a thing here? “I'm told you can train me with the sword.”

The man smiled. “The sword, the bow, the halberd, if it's a weapon, I can train you in it.”

“I'd like to learn how to wield a one-handed sword.”

The man's face fell. “That would be the one weapon I can't train you with at the moment.” He motioned to empty racks alongside a building. “As you can see, I don't have

any for you to use.”

James saw there were no weapons on any of the racks. Would anyone asking to be trained encounter this problem? James smiled. He knew the solution to this, at least.

“Is there any way I can help with that?”

“I would certainly be grateful for the assistance, but I don’t know what you’ll be able to do. Dominic, the blacksmith, is a surly fellow. He hasn’t brought me the swords I need so I can train and equip the militia. If you could convince him to do what we pay him for, I’d repay you by giving you training in the one-handed sword.”

You have been offered a quest by Charles the Trainer.

Quest: The surly Hammer.

The Blacksmith, Dominic, isn’t holding up his end of the agreement with the Shimmerland militia for some reason. Go and convince him to deliver the swords he owes.

Reward. +1 level in one-handed Sword, + 1 Fame, Charles the Trainer’s gratitude.

James accepted the quest. “How long will the training last?” he activated his insight ability.

Insight use successful

Charles the Trainer wants more people to train.

“An hour should do it,” the man answered.

James looked around. Other than the two of them, there was no one there. “I’m seeing you don’t have a lot of people here to train. How about you train me for a full day instead?”

“A full day?” Charles looked thoughtful. “I suppose I don’t have anything better to do.” He nodded. “Alright, you get the blacksmith to deliver his weapons and I’ll train you for a day.”

Quest Update

The surly Hammer

Reward update: +5 level in one-handed Sword, + 1 Fame, Charles the Trainer’s gratitude.

“And how about including a sword once I’m done? It would make me more useful to the town, I could even join the militia.”

Charles studied James, and there was something... different about how the NPC regarded him. James wanted to call it more alive, but the trainer was still just a program. Maybe he’d trigger something and one of the programmers had taken over?

“Join the militia, for a sword.” Charles looked to be considering it. “Why not? We can always use more people when monsters attack.

Quest Update

The surly Hammer

Reward update: +5 level in one-handed Sword, + 1 Fame, Charles the Trainer’s gratitude. A one-handed sword. System note, the acquisition of the one-handed sword is dependent on both the completion of the quest and joined the Shimmerland militia.

James was sure the trainer had smiled then, but it had been fleeting, and then he was back to his neutral expression. Even his eyes no longer seemed as alive as a few seconds ago.

The programmer had relinquished control back to the program running the NPCs? Would they do that any time a player pushed what an NPC could do? It was only him in the game at the moment. How would they handle it when it was thousands of players? The initial wave would be five thousand. Did the company behind the game have enough people to deal with all of them?

James smiled. “It’s a deal.”

“You’ll find the blacksmith in the northeast part of the city. Just look for the large open-air building with the black smoke coming out of it. You can’t miss it.”

James turned and saw the green glow in the distance. “You’re right. I won’t be able to miss it. See you soon.” He rubbed his hands. Plenty of people to speak with on the way there, and back, and tomorrow he’d have his training and five new skill points, not counting the increase in his persuasion this was going to grant him. This was going to be a good day.