

Virtua

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This is all I have. I'd really appreciate suggestions on what to do next.

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1 - An Intro

Beep beep. Beep beep. Beep beep. The alarm clock continued to sing in its high-pitched voice. Five minutes passed...then ten minutes.

A grunt was issued from underneath many sheets on a bed. A hand shot out and groped for the clock, switching it off after stumbling to its front. The hand then lifted the sheets off the bed. A blond-haired boy looked out. He turned his head toward the clock and shot out of bed. He dashed out his bedroom to the front door, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. The sink flashed on and off as he cleaned himself up – brushing his teeth, using the bathroom, etc. He dashed back into his room and slipped on a shirt from his drawer and threw on a pair of pants. He grabbed his backpack and glasses and headed downstairs.

“It’s about time you got up, Xander,” his elder sister said from the kitchen. She walked into the room, with a shoulder bag in hand. “I made you waffles,” she explained, handing him two toasted pastries. “The bus will be here in thirty minutes. I need to go to school early to tutor a kid. I’ll see you later.” They walked out the door together and she headed toward her car.

“See ya later, Silvia,” he mumbled. He cut across the lawn onto the sidewalk and watched her pull out. He continued down the road to an intersection and waited with other kids from the street. The other kids never even looked at him as he approached, continuing with their conversations. They paused their talking to get on the bus, where the noise was even louder as kids were talking about homework, teachers, video games, and crushes.

“Are you going to buy Virtua after-school? They’re launching the public servers today.”

“Yeah. Couldn’t go last night because my parents kept me in to study.”

“Do you think the Council will be online for the opening?”

“Only one way to find out. Want to swap usernames so we can meet?”

Xander listened to the two boys talk about the newest video game, Virtua. It was the only game so far that used virtual reality and the VR Helms. Waiting in line to buy it last night stole his sleep from him.

2 - Uploading

“I know the Council is composed of Dylan Banisher, Pyro Manz, and Cole Slaw. Anyone else?”

“Not that I know of. There are rumors already that they are going to start adding to the Council once the servers are open to the public, though. Maybe they’ll reveal a new one.”

The game had gotten a lot of hype over the past few weeks. The creators, which are the Council, were pretty rich when they pooled their money. They could afford advertising – they even did a closed alpha test, which they sent game packages to random people. Xander watched as the bus slowed to a halt in the lot to drop off the kids. Everybody stood up to get off.

Xander walked into homeroom with his books and took a seat at the front of the class. A couple of kids were already in from earlier buses. After more kids came in, the teacher started roll-call.

“Aramandi, Arthur”

“Here”

“Besales, Martin”

“Here”

She slowly worked her way down the line until, “Zecandela, Xander”

“Here,” Xander said monotonously.

The morning announcements soon started up on the loudspeaker. Xander turned his mind towards what his character would be. Soon, the bell for classes rang.

Later that day, immediately after school, Xander walked into his bedroom. He pulled some books out of his bag and answered some questions. After a few minutes, he looked at the clock. 3:58. The servers launched at 5. He jumped off his bed and grabbed a plastic bag on the floor, pulling out a game case and a visor.

“Virtua” was written in Gothic lettering on the front of the game case, showing background images of mages casting spells and warriors battling demons. He opened the case and stuck the CD into his computer. He came to the teal screen that starts up a program. About to start, he heard a door close downstairs.

3 - Transitions

“Xander, I’m home. Need any help with anything?” Silvia called.

He looked at his monitor. He clicked the “Next” button and a lot of options came up. “Yeah. Can you help me install something?” He heard his sister walk up the creaky stairs. She walked into his room and looked at the screen.

“Out of the chair,” she commanded. He got up and she sat down. He saw her clicking buttons, reading statements, and typing. When she was finished, a dull gold screen with the Virtua logo, a full set of silver armor with a staff across it, was up. “Okay, put on the helmet and pull down the visor. Hitting the right ear-piece will log you in,” she read from an instruction manual that came from the game case. She got out of the chair, but stopped him from sitting down. “I expect you to finish your homework. The servers won’t be up for another hour and a half, so work on it.”

“How do you know? You don’t do anything but sit in your room and study,” he asked, accusation in his voice.

“I’m hip; I hear things,” she replied, sarcastically. She left his room and went down the hall to hers. She stuck a “Studying – Don’t disturb unless dinner” sign on her door and closed it. Xander shook his head back and forth in his hands as he watched her leave. Then he turned and fiddled with his clock, setting the alarm for 4:50PM. He returned to his schoolwork.

Beep beep. Beep beep. Beep beep.

He quickly grabbed his alarm clock and reset the alarm back to its normal time. With one last look over his homework, he sat down in the computer’s chair and put on the helmet. Pulling down the visor, he pushed a button on the right ear piece.

Then darkness overwhelmed him.

4 - New player?

“Hey. Player. Get up,” a voice commanded. Xander was face down on the floor. He looked up to see darkness around him. “You need to set your character’s defaults.”

He stood up and the voice spoke.

“Username?” it inquired.

He thought for a moment before answering. “Xonder.” (pronounced like wander)

“Species?”

“Human.”

“Starter class?” the voice asked.

“Warrior.”

A screen came up showing a boy that looked roughly like him. An overlay of a leather chest plate appeared on it. The boy held a dull wooden sword.

“Character appearance: Default or custom?”

This command he didn’t remember. “Custom.”

“Syncing will begin...”

He looked at the picture and saw the basic clothes turn blue and black tattoo-like markings appear on the character. His hair colored to a light blue and got longer and the shorts his character had on lengthened to his ankles. The screen lengthened and broadened until the character was the same size as him. He looked over the character’s design while tapping his foot impatiently. The character mimicked his actions.

“Are all settings good for finalization?” the voice asked. A window appeared on the upper-right corner of the screen. *Xonder, Lvl 1 Warrior.*

“Yes.”

“Welcome to the land of Virtua.”

5 - Need any help?

He felt a force push on his chest, then found himself in a clearing with other players. They were all chatting.

“Omigosh omigosh omigosh! I can’t wait. When do they insert us into the world?” a young girl nearby asked.

An older boy, probably in his late teens, answered, “Five exactly, VHT or EST.”

Another boy, younger than the first one by only a little bit, pulled out a watch. “Two minutes.”

All the players’ character images looked antsy. Some were twiddling their thumbs, others were dancing, some boys were wrestling, and the youngest of the kids were running around between other players. Xonder smiled, sharing the adrenaline of the other players. His hands were twitching with excitement as he watched other players enter.

Suddenly, a bright flare of light appeared off to the side. Another flare followed opposite it. Everyone backed away as Pyro Manz and Dylan Banisher stepped out of them.

“Looks like we got a good crew in the scrap server,” Pyro Manz laughed, pulling down the hood of his red robe. His short dark red hair was sticking up with a tuft of blond at the front. He was the tallest person in the area.

Dylan drew his sword. “Are you guys ready?” he yelled, raising his sword in the air. The whole crowd cheered.

“Then let’s launch the server, Pyro!” he ordered. Pyro raised a metal staff with a red crystal on the end. It flared, then the meadow transformed into a town. There were players standing on the buildings in the town, watching the new players come in. They raised their weapons in greeting to the new players, some of who saluted back.

Another adult player, dressed like a cook, walked out of a stall to address the players. “Welcome everyone to Virtua. For those of you who actually read the instruction manual, you’ll know this area is the hometown, or Newtown. For those who don’t, well you know now,” Cole Slaw stated. “If you have any questions, feel free to ask the Alphars and Betars. The first portal should be up in a few minutes, while we run some last minute tests.” Pyro, Dylan, and Cole disappeared, replaced by the green words “Log Out”, which soon faded.

Xonder looked around at the roofs. People were doing mad scrambles to get up on them using ladders. Looking around, Xonder spotted a stall’s roof close to a low building roof. Fighting the crowd, he pulled onto the stall and hung his feet off.

“Need any help?” a fully covered cleric asked. She leaned over her roof and dangled her staff. Xonder

grinned and grabbed it. He saw her pull back with a lot of effort, as he walked up the wall.

“Next time, use a ladder please. I can’t go dragging every newbie up the walls,” the cleric said. She had her hood up, so her face wasn’t showing. Her robes were long sleeved and long in the legs, with silver thread. He grinned at her.

“Alphar or Betar?” he asked her as she turned to answer questions from the crowd.

“Both,” she stated before the crowd swallowed her. “And when the portal comes up, just target it and command in ‘Use’. It’ll get flooded before you have a chance to get within ten yards range.”

6 - By invite only

Xonder turned toward the area where the portal would launch. Looking around, he finally jumped down onto the stall's roof again. From there, he dropped to the ground. It was still pretty crowded as players took the time to get to know other players. He watched a pair of warriors, a human and an elf, play-fight with their swords. He gripped his loosely at his waist.

"Hey! Person who calls himself Xonder! Over here!" a feminine voice called. He looked up at its source – a young bard class girl elf in pink robes. She dashed up to him through the crowd. "You're lucky that Betar saw you. You might have been stuck up there for a while. I got stuck waiting to ask a person and then other people butted in front of me."

He looked at her. "What do you want?"

"What did she tell you?" the girl asked.

"Targeting the portal and commanding 'Use' will activate it from a distance," he explained.

"Oh," she answered. She waited then inquired, "Would you like to form a party with me?"

He looked up at her. "If I knew how to, then yes. I'm sure you can help me with your status ability."

She laughed. "Just target me and command in 'Party'. It'll send me an invite."

He grinned. "I would, but I don't know how to target."

She rolled her eyes. "Mentally focus on an object and a cursor will appear on it with options. PCs will contain their character info in their menu boxes."

He placed his cursor over her. *Melody, Lvl 1 Bard*. "Now how do I command something in?" he asked.

"Just state the command in short-tone. Single word or phrase commands work," she replied.

"Party. Invite target," he commanded. He took his cursor off of her. He rolled his neck. Seconds later, he heard a ding.

7 - First Adventure

“Kaykay, we’re a party. Ooh, I can’t wait to battle my first monster! Let’s see if we can find any other players to form a party with us,” she told him, pulling him towards a mass of players. “There’s a mage over there! Want to ask him? Says that his name is Shadeflare. Probably going to second-tier as a dark mage. He would be very useful to our party. I can’t attack well as a bard, but I offer good support and my first song is a defense song. Mages start off with a zapping spell and I think warriors start off with an ability that increases their attack for a minute. Everybody has a basic attack, so I’ve been wondering what mine looks like considering I only carry a harp or guitar...”

“Don’t you ever stop talking?” Xonder frustratedly asked.

“Nope!” Melody replied.

“I should have seen that coming,” Xonder laughed.

“Shadeflare! Want to form a party with us?” Melody inquired, pulling on the boy’s sleeve. Xonder realized that Melody had maneuvered him carefully through the crowd. The boy turned in his dark robes and looked at the pair.

“A warrior and a bard. Why should I join you?” he darkly asked her.

“Easy. As a mage, you have low defense. I can offer to create a shield and increase your defense. And the warrior is in case you don’t join me. I need somebody who can attack. Bard stats are terrible,” she explained.

A smile flashed across his face. “At least one of you isn’t just a pretty face,” he sneered.

“I resent that! I’m stuck with a bard who never stops talking!” Xonder yelled. “Besides, rushing into battle without a second thought is standard warrior procedure. You die or your opponent does. If you rush in first, your opponent can’t think either.”

Shadeflare crossed his arms. “Sure. I can always use someone to make a kill easier. But if you die, I get your experience. Which one of you is the group leader?”

Xonder waved his hand awkwardly. “I am. Only because I don’t know how to receive party invites,” he added sheepishly.

“If you want the party to stay together, then send me an invite already,” Shadeflare commanded impatiently. “The portal’s gonna open soon.”

Xonder sent the invite and heard the confirming ding a few seconds later. “We can target the portal from here to get to it. We don’t have to walk up to it,” he informed Shadeflare.

“Interesting tidbit. Where did you hear that?”

Melody answered the question before Xonder could. “He got the info from a Betar. She pulled him up a wall from the shop-covering.” Shadeflare snorted.

Xonder looked up above their heads.

“Uh...guys...Portal’s opening...”

They both turned towards it, as a dark twinkles appeared in the area designated as “Portal Send-off”. The whole crowd was looking.

“Get ready to target it,” Shadeflare ordered. “If you target it, we’ll be able to follow you.” As soon as a portal reached full size, a crowd stampeded towards it.

Xonder targeted the portal. “Portal, enter.” His sight grayed and shifted.

When it recolored, he found himself in a dense forest. Melody and Shadeflare materialized soon after.

8 - A pinecone?

Melody looked around. "This is First Forest. A lot of the monsters here are low level. We should be able to take them out quickly. We'll need to watch for other parties; they may have landed nearby. This is one of the few battle zones that can land you anywhere on the map."

Xonder spotted a large chipmunk in a tree. He targeted it. *Forest Chipmunk, Lvl 1, 5 health*. He walked up to the tree it was hiding in and banged the flat of his wooden blade against it. The chipmunk leapt out of the tree at him. Xonder thrust out his sword and stepped back, slicing the chipmunk. *4 health*.

Shadeflare banged the chipmunk with his staff. Melody strummed a harsh chord. "I think we'll only do one damage to it at a time. No point in wasting spells yet," Shadeflare explained. The chipmunk bit Xonder.

"Owww..." Xonder complained. "That actually hurt."

"You can turn the damage settings off after the battle. That'll stop it from hurting you physically, but your health will still go down," Melody explained. "Attack him again!" Xonder and Shadeflare both lashed out and hit the chipmunk.

Forest Chipmunk. 0 health. Combat Rewards: 4 experience, 1 pinecone.

"Do we each get 4 experience, or is that for the whole party?" Xonder asked.

"It calculates it as each. There is a total of 12 experience per chipmunk. Players that deal the most damage get the most experience during the battle, and ties go to the faster player," Shadeflare informed the party. "And what the heck are we supposed to do with a pinecone?"

"Maybe it is a quest item?" Xonder offered. "You never know. Maybe some NPC wants to grow pine trees, so they need pinecones that contain seeds?"

"Sounds reasonable enough for rookies. And you might want to turn off the damage settings, Xonder. You have 14/15 health left," Melody replied.

"Right...Settings. Damage. Toggle," Xonder commanded in.

9 - X is for minion?

“Let’s go look for more vermin,” Shadeflare commanded. “We’ll level up quickly at this rate.” The party jumped as a crashing sound was heard from yards away. A wolf cub came rushing towards them.

Wolf cub. Lvl 3X. 12/12 health.

“Boss Minion! It’s got a level X! Go after him!” Melody yelled excitedly. She ran towards the wolf cub, playing harsh notes. The cub howled and then attacked Xonder. “He took three points off you! I’m going to play the defense song, hang on!” She strummed a chord on her harp and a grey aura came up around the party. “Hit him with spells!”

Shadeflare cast lightning from his hands and Xonder followed it up with a double-slash. *Wolf cub. 5/12 health.* The wolf went after Shadeflare with snapping jaws. As the wolf came in contact with Shadeflare, he thrust his hand into the cub’s throat and the wolf lit up with light. It caught on fire and sagged to the ground.

“And that’s what happens when you mess with thunder,” Shadeflare sneered.

Melody turned and focused on each player. “Xonder, we should probably start thinking about getting healing items at the town market. You’ll automatically heal in a town, but not in a combat zone.”

“No point in doing that now. We don’t have any armor to lose.” Shadeflare looked around. “If that was a cub, its mother should be nearby. Also, we just leveled up.”

“Are you serious? The cub nearly did us in!” Xonder went wide-eyed with surprise. Shadeflare raised an eye. “Three damage! The mother will do, like, seven! And she’ll have thirty health!”

“So? As I said, it is not like we have anything to lose.” Shadeflare started walking away.

10 - Mother Wolf X+

“Shadeflare, the mother wolf will kill you. It’s even faster and, from what I hear, a mini-boss,” Melody commented.

“That’s why I have you two with me. To keep me from being killed.”

“Fine, but if you die, we’re gonna run if it seems like a lost cause.”

“Fine by me,” he said, walking away. Xonder shrugged his soldiers and followed Shadeflare. They encountered another Forest Chipmunk, which they successfully defeated. Xonder loss one more health, so he was at 10/15 health. They heard nothing when the mother wolf attacked them.

“Hey!” Melody cried, after being bitten. She played her attack chord, soon followed by a spell and a sword thrust. “Don’t waste your spells! It’s only taking one damage from them.”

The wolf went after Melody again, dealing five damage again. “I’m down to five health. One more attack and I’m toast!” She played her Song of Defense while the other two attacked the mother, dealing one damage each. *Mother wolf. Lvl 5X+. 25/30 health.* The wolf attacked Melody again, dealing four damage. “I’m critical! She stunned me too! I can’t attack this round.” Xonder put a lot of strength into his next attack, dealing two damage while Shadeflare dealt one.

Melody has been killed. Respawn at hometown.

“Shadeflare, why didn’t we level up more before taking this wolf down?”

“This is our level up!” He struck again, while Xonder imitated him and did two damage again. The wolf dashed towards Xonder now, but he dodged out of the way. Right before she hit the ground, she snapped at Shadeflare, who in turn, cursed.

“He forgot to turn off the damage settings, too,” Xonder muttered. He slashed at the wolf, Shadeflare following his thrust. The mother wolf slashed at Xonder and did nine damage to him. “I have one health left!” He desperately sliced the wolf, but did only one damage. Shadeflare attacked too, but dodged the counterattack. Xonder didn’t.

11 - Healing of the body

“No!” he yelled. That was his last health. Then he looked up. “I didn’t die?”

“You guys really should have leveled before battling the mother wolf,” someone else said. Xonder looked behind him. It was the silver cleric from before. “I just healed you. Even a low level healer is useless against this monster. Now attack her.” The two boys rushed at the target. The wolf attacked Shadeflare. When the cleric thwacked the wolf with her stick, it collapsed.

“We just got two level ups!” Shadeflare exclaimed. Xonder checked his stats. He’d gained 5 strength, 3 speed, 1 mana, 4 balance, and 4 defense.

“I’m not surprised,” the cleric said. “It was level 5X+. You should have had more levels before you battled it in the first place.”

Xonder selected his rescuer. *Silvina, Lvl 40 Cleric*. “Haha, that’s really funny. I have a sister by the name of Silvia.”

The cleric looked at Xonder, but her expression was undeterminable because her hood covered all except her chin. “Probably just a coincidence. Any ways, I have to go make sure other arrogant newbies aren’t killing themselves. Bye now.” The cleric ran off in another direction, her staff held behind her head in a casual manner.

12 - Let's go home...

“Well, we best head back to town. I need to heal,” Shadeflare commented. He disappeared, replaced by the green word “Home”. Xonder followed him.

When Xonder landed in Newtown, it was almost completely different. It was bustling with low level players and NPCs. A man was helping a child haggle for potions to his left and a brawl was happening to his right. It almost seemed normal.

“Xander, log off. Dinner is ready,” his sister’s voice explained. He realized that he hadn’t even heard her, he was so absorbed in the game.

“Party, disband. Player log out.” Xander pulled off his helmet and found his sister leaning on his chair.

“So how was it, testing out the VR system? It took them a while to develop it,” Silvia commented.

Xander got out of his chair and stretched. “How do you know how long it took them to develop it?”

Silvia rolled her eyes. “It’s a VR system that hooks up to your nerves. It took a while to develop it.”

Xander’s mouth twitched at his own stupidity. “I met a cleric called Silvina, an Alphar.”

His sister just gave him a *Whatever*. glance and left the room, going down the stairs. He listened to her footfall. He sighed and turned off the standby screen on his computer, going back to the desktop. He jogged downstairs to the food. It was a nice dinner, considering his father didn’t cook it. Silvia took care of it by herself, and it was a simple meal of pasta and sauce.

13 - Concerned

“So, how did the game run? No glitches or lag or that sort of thing?” Silvia asked.

Xonder slurped his noodle. “None at all. They really got it working. I suspect trouble in the future from too many people on the servers, but I think there’ll be enough money for new servers.”

Silvia sat back. “As soon as there is lag, I want you off. You don’t know what will happen once the servers get screwed up.”

Xonder nearly choked. “So you drive me out to buy the game...and then say I can’t play it once it lags? That sucks!”

Silvia turned her eyes to him. Unusually serious, she commented, “That technology is still new. What if you try to log out when the game is laggy and find out that you are stuck because of it? You’d be trapped in a coma if we unplugged you, but it’s the only way to get you food. I don’t want that happening.”

Xonder could see the concern in her eyes, giving them a depth he did not recognize. He smiled slightly and nodded. “I understand. I’m guessing that I should go to shower.”

“Probably. I don’t want you having two late nights in a row, so I expect you to be reading or studying, not playing video games until the crack of dawn. Go get your stuff ready. I want you in and out.”

14 - Things have been different...

Xonder got out of his chair and cleaned his dishes, sticking them in the dishwasher. Silvia cleaned up the pots, scrubbing them with a rough sponge to get all the bits out after she poured the excess pasta into plastic containers for leftovers. Xonder trotted upstairs to grab his pajamas before heading into the bathroom down the hall. His sister was back in her room studying as he came out with his wet hair dripping on the carpet. He knocked on her door.

“Bathroom’s open,” he called. He heard her get up from her own computer and walk over to the door. She nodded tiredly, opening the door. Xonder tried to get into her room, but she pushed him out like always. All he saw at the computer was lines of code.

“Go to your room, Xond. You need to sleep. Don’t you have a test tomorrow in Geometry?” She grinned playfully as Xonder scowled. “Study or sleep. No more videogames for the rest of the night, remember that now. I don’t want to see you get a C on an exam just because you fell asleep halfway through it.”

He turned around and waved her off, heading back to his room and grabbing his geometry textbook. He read over the chapter that the class was going to be tested on. He then forcefully plopped back on his bed, right as his sister walked in. Her hair was curled around her shoulder, dry and having a brush run through it.

“Anything wrong, Xond?”

He sighed. “Things have really been different since Mom left. We rarely see Dad anymore, he’s so busy at work.”

She stopped brushing her hair. “I know, but we have to work through it. We don’t stop living our lives because someone we cared for was stopped. We keep moving on, but we always remember them. Besides, you have me!” She twirled and posed comically, enough so that Xonder would laugh. She stepped back towards the door. “Good night, Xonder. No more delaying.” She turned off the light as he put his book down. She left his door open a crack and went downstairs to turn the lights off down there before returning to her own room.