

“...Augh, when’s the last time I’ve been here?”

Mira couldn’t help but recoil when they climbed into their attic in what must’ve been years. It was all dank, dark, desolate, and otherwise disturbing to go through. Where did all this dust even come from? They were kicking up whole clouds of it just by shifting their position ever so slightly! Mira quickly sorted through the boxes of old Christmas decorations, random tchotchkes of uncertain origin, ill-fitting clothes, miscellaneous VHS tapes despite the fact they didn’t even have a VCR anymore, and general crap that Mira most definitely didn’t need anymore. They were surprised at how quickly they were getting this done, however—maybe that gym membership was finally starting to amount to something, they figured. Soon enough, the boxes were shuffled out (invariably going to be rotting in some Goodwill in due time), all the dust had thankfully been eradicated for now, and they were just getting done screwing in a new lightbulb. The newfound illumination of the room brought their eyes to something, though—a straggler of a box in the corner! Opening it up, Mira was delighted to see their old DS in there! They’d been meaning to get back into it for years, but couldn’t find it for the life of them. Part of them were convinced it was gone forever, but to say they were elated to jump right back in would be an understatement. Those boxes could wait, because right now they were in for a date that was years overdue!

The next few hours flew by without Mira as much as noticing. Booting up that old gray DS Lite, the clock hadn’t skipped a beat since they last played it! They didn’t even know the battery could last that long, even if it wasn’t powered on. All their old favorite games were here, and Mira couldn’t wipe off the smile on their face as they began to replay them one by one, memories flooding back into their mind by the minute. Trying to grapple with the terrible d-pad controls of Super Mario 64 DS, grinding up their beloved Mawile up to level 100 in their Pokemon Platinum file, the immeasurable amount of guilt that filled their body revisiting their old Animal Crossing: Wild World save, and getting another reminder that they absolutely stank at Rhythm Heaven, all of it was absolutely sublime. As the sun went down, Mira was about to call it a day and go make some dinner, until they got to the last game: Cooking Mama.

How serendipitous, Mira thought. They recalled their memories of this particular game. For some reason, it was always their favorite, but they could never parse out directly why. It was just a bunch of touch screen minigames, after all! Yet, maybe it was that simplicity that made a young Mira come back to it, they reflected. It was all so warm and inviting, easy to zone out to when listening to something in the background, and Mama’s presence in the game was distinctly endearing. It wouldn’t hurt to play it for a few minutes, Mira figured...

Yet, those few minutes quickly transformed into another few hours as Mira was completely sucked into the game. The drive of completing all the recipes in the game utterly captivated them for hours on end, and by the time it was past 10 o’clock, they were almost done completing every single recipe completely perfectly, yet hadn’t even stopped to eat. Even with how delicious this shrimp wonton was looking, they were not gonna divert their attention from this for one second. For all they knew, their house was burning to the ground, but they weren’t gonna budge until they one hundred-percent this game!

“Even Better Than Mama!” the game proclaimed. Mira raised their arms in celebration; they’d truly conquered this game! Now to *actually* make some dinner. What to make, though? Well, they were in the mood for—

“Reward unlocked!” Another announcement came from within the game. They looked back at the screen, interest piqued. “Sweet! New content! I didn’t know there *were* more game modes...”

*Zap!* “Oww! What the hell was that?” A rush of electricity surged from the DS and into Mira’s body. Was the system so old, it was spouting out surges? They really needed to replace this if it—

Within a split second, a bright white glow enveloped Mira’s body. All of their atoms, from their clothes to their hair, were gone in a flash, leaving the DS to drop to the floor. Meanwhile, inside the console, Mira rematerialized. Looking all around them, this red striped background was all they could see, and a glance upward revealed a text box with the word “Change!” typed within. Change? What the hell did that mean? They couldn’t for the life of them move in any other direction other than left or right on the top screen, nor could they even escape the bounds of that said screen occupied on the actual system! ...And were their hands looking...pixelly? Were they trapped in the game?

“W-what the...where am—”

>DATA IMPORTED

>STARTING TRANSFER...

Before Mira could even finish their sentence, an influx of data was shooting into their head, soon overwriting the myriad of thoughts and worries that were occupying said space previously. Soon, these would begin to be replaced by all the rigid statements, logic, and premade lines the game had. Just by being in the game, their once three-dimensional, complex body was now reduced to an aliased sprite, which only got more apparent as their body was subjected to the world of the game with every passing second. Yet, this was not even close to the changes Mira’s body would undergo in the next few minutes.

Things started within Mira’s hands, as the fingers they had became no more. All of the flesh, muscle, and bone that had comprised them before had already been overwritten once they entered the game’s world, but now, they were going limp, four of them on each hand fusing together to become what was effectively mittens—perfect for grabbing things, yet not much else. This also erased all the other fine details in their hands; everything from fingernails to body hair was completely shaven off. The pigment in the skin was lightening as well, going from Mira’s dark tan skin that they had all their life to something more peach-colored. Slowly, this new pigment was encroaching up their arms as they were beginning to slim down, simplifying into thin, cartoony noodle appendages.

Meanwhile, towards their clothing, those were beginning to undergo some massive changes as well. The outline of a yellow apron was starting to form out of Mira's green hoodie, spawning itself into existence out of said garment. All the way past their knees it flapped down, a large pocket forming on the front of it. Underneath, a nice shirt was forming from the remains of the hoodie, drawstrings soon becoming the collar and the whole shirt becoming a plain white. The changes from their arms were centralizing on their body now, smoothing out any complex detail that it harbored, thinning out to look young and spry for a mother. Not even breasts were needed for the womanly figure Mira was about to become (this wasn't Babysitting Mama, after all).

>OVERWRITING DATA

>DELETING OBSOLETE FILES

>INSTALLING MAMA.EXE...

It was at this point where Mira was starting to lose themselves in the whole torrent of information barging into their mind's doorway. Her eyes were utterly entranced, hypnotized to the game's will. Even all of their thoughts were starting to look like

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00010101110 UDON 10100100001 BEEF CURRY 100011
1101001010101 RICE BALLS 10001111 CHESTNUT RICE
11001 RICE CAKES 00011101 MIXED TEMPURA 100101
SOBA 0001011101010110 CROQUETTE 11011010111100
0001010 FRIED RICE 10001010101010101 SUSHI 00001
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at this point! True to what the game was commanding, all of Mira's other thoughts were being jettisoned as it was deemed unnecessary compared to what the game needed. Precious memories of her friends? Gone. Important life events? Donezo. Who they even were? Suffice to say, they were starting to look more Mama than Mira by now! Even breathing was old news as all the game needed for them—*her* to know was fine dining.

Right now, her body was in the midst of shrinking down, compressing and exaggerating its proportion to become something much more stylized. While her body was getting smaller, however, her head was busy inflating itself slightly, becoming almost perfectly rounded. The lightened skin from her hands was busy invading her face, her glasses were fading away fast as she didn't even need to see anything, her nose was being sapped into her head as smell was equally out of the equation, her eyes were simplifying into mere black shapes, lashes, and highlights for pupils, and her mouth was slowly etching itself into a wide smile. To cap off the changes on her head, her hair was ruffling, extending its length slightly to make its way past her shoulders, while brightening to a medium scarlet hue. A pink kerchief, speckled with white dots, materialized to tie it altogether. As she finished shrinking, legs thinned out, and shoes were lightened to a simple white, the changes concluded themselves as she did a little twirl,

brandishing a spatula for when she did so. From now on, she was Mama. That's all she was, and all she needed to be.

>TRANSFER COMPLETE

The game decided to celebrate such changes with another screen, with a perfect 100 score and another "Even Better Than Mama!" message popping up on the screen. Mama couldn't help but do a pose, as in she literally couldn't—she was coded to do so! No other thoughts were entering into her mind at this point, as she barely had any besides what the game told her. Not even the logical paradox of her doing something "better than Mama," even though that's who she was now was thought about. And on that screen she stayed, in that same pose, waiting for another press of the button to continue the game...

"Hello, Mira? I came here because I was told your house was burning down. We managed to stop it, though!" Mira's old friend Hud walked into the room where the DS was lying, still stuck on that same screen.

"Look, a free DS! A round or two couldn't hurt..."

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