

## Chapter -9

Normann’s tailor shop came into view as I zoomed down the street full of stores. The metal shutters were down and it was clear that some people had unsuccessfully tried to break in despite it. Although the glass windows were smashed to bits, it seemed its integrity was maintained for now. But I would change that shortly.

I skidded to a halt, feeling my calves burning and drawing air in quick breaths. It was almost completely dark now, but the surviving lamps flickered on, lighting up the street and the many wrecked cars.

“I need to upgrade my Stamina next,” I decided.

“Why not your Defense?” asked Panda. “Did you already forget how you lost your arms??”

“I don’t want to be some damage sponge for monsters to slap around,” I replied. “If I can move around fast enough, I won’t need defense at all!”

“I wonder what happens to me when you die?” the plushie mused philosophically.

“Don’t give up on me just like that!”

I looked around the area near the tailor shop for enemies and players, but it was empty for now. There weren’t any public buildings or facilities in the vicinity, which perhaps limited the kinds of monsters that roamed through here. That being said, there was a worryingly-deep furrow down the asphalted road and overturned cars which had clearly been pushed aside by *something massive* travelling through here.

“You think whatever made *that* will come back this way?” Panda asked.

“If it’s territorial, perhaps. It looks similar to the tracks from the park outside the asylum, where Annabella’s group was attacked by a bus.”

“We could probably take it, if we met a bus like that,” he replied confidently.

“What’s this ‘we’ business? So far, you’ve just been sitting there while I do all the fighting.”

“Well, I’m like your manager or guiding fairy.”

“Aren’t fairies supposed to be skinny and nimble?”

“...Too far, Gambit.”

“Sorry.”

I walked over to the shuttered storefront of Normann’s, bypassing the jewelry store next door which had been looted all the way down to the display cases, leaving nothing but debris remaining within. As well as some old blood. But no bodies.

“I think there’s something eating all the dead people,” I said. “We definitely would’ve been seeing corpses everywhere otherwise.”

“Maybe they come out at night?”

“That can’t be right,” I said. “There weren’t any dead people in the park at all, and they were all attacked during the day, right after the announcement.”

“You think the bus monsters are eating all the bodies?”

I shuddered. “You’re freaking me out.”

“You started this topic!”

“Well, I’m shutting it down. No more talk of busses!”

I squatted down, really feeling the burn in my thighs and calves, then used my gauntleted right hand to grip the bottom of the metal shutter and pulled as I stood back up, loudly tearing an opening large enough for me to squeeze through.

After pushing myself in, and Panda waddling in after me, I pulled the flap back down, just in case. The interior of the store was completely dark, thanks to no natural light getting in, but I discovered that my Punch-Glove’s carapace had a faint luminescent glow, which allowed me to see my surroundings a bit.

I looked through the rows of neat suits, dress pants, and shirts, until I reached a backroom, where a convenient flashlight awaited me. I picked it up, flicked the button to on... and nothing happened.

“Didn’t Annabella say that all electricity died?”

I grumbled in annoyance, then marched back to the shutters and lifted the flap up just enough to cascade a bit of the streetlight into the store, so I could actually find what I was looking for.

Though the light still didn’t fully reach the back of the many rows of clothes, I was able to locate a few suits in my size, which I promptly started trying on, one-by-one. One of them tore as I miscalculated my own strength, but I managed to find two that were just my size. I kept one of the suits on, while throwing the other in my inventory.

## Gambit's Inventory

x



Although my total weight with the suit was now over twenty pandas, or, as I roughly estimated it: eighteen pounds, I didn't feel any heavier, although I could feel how putting on new socks, dress pants, shoes, and the suit had eliminated the effects of my BIRTHDAY\_SUIT passive.

While I was looking at my inventory, I tapped the Whistle to figure out if it actually did anything:

| <b>'Conspiracy Whistle'</b>   | x |
|---|---|
| <i>It may look like a cheap plastic whistle, and that's because it is, however, it can produce a sound so annoying it actually has magical effects.</i> |   |

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|--|
| <p><i>Sometimes conspiracies are spot-on, and other times they only breed more insanity.</i></p> <p><i>Blowing a note in this whistle reveals any shapeshifters within 10 yards, but inflicts +10% <b>insanity</b> to any Player within 100 yards.</i></p> |
| <p><b>Weight:</b> 1.3 Pandas</p>   |

“That’s a heavy whistle,” Panda commented. “What kind of plastic do you think they used?” I ignored his dumb question and clicked the pop-up away, then tapped the Looking Glass:

|   |
|---|
| <p><b>‘Looking Glass’</b> <span style="float: right;">x</span></p>  |
| <p><i>Rewarded for participating in the clearance of two Dungeons, this Looking Glass is a useful tool for any strategic Player wanting a leg up on the competition.</i></p> <p><i>Just don’t use it to start fires with sunlight, it will not end well. Trust me.</i></p> <p><i>Any Enemy, Boss, or Player viewed through this Looking Glass will have information about them revealed to you.</i></p> <p><i>Using this to look at certain entities will inflict +50% <b>insanity</b>. Use with caution.</i></p> |
| <p><b>Weight:</b> 1.1 Pandas</p>  |

“Oh, it’s like Appraisal,” I said, remembering a useful skill from an old RPG I’d played. “Seems useful, though I wonder what the warning is about.” “I’ll try it when the sun comes back up,” I said. “Do you enjoy ignoring warnings and breaking rules?” Panda asked. “Yes.”

I spasmed awake a few hours later, after having unintentionally dozed off in a corner of the tailor store, when the sound of loud scraping came from outside. It sounded like someone was dragging one of the wrecked cars out front down the street for no other reason than to make a lot of noise.

Looking up above my head, I couldn't see the beacon, though I was certain that it was still visible outside in the air above Normann's shop.

“I'm surprised no one tried to kill you while you slept,” Panda said. “But don't worry I've kept watch.”

“Thanks,” I replied, then paused. “What would you have done if someone actually tried to kill me?”

“Hm... I never thought that far.”

The loud scraping continued travelling down the street outside, seeming to come nearer as its volume was steadily increasing.

“Would you mind checking what's making that noise?” I asked him.

“Are you crazy!? What if it eats me!”

I sighed. “You're a real help, Panda, you know that?”

“Hey don't blame the mascot!”

“Mascot?”

“Yeah. That's my Class!”

“...The System gave you a Class?”

“Well, no, but imagine if it did!”

“Alright, shut up, you're giving me a migraine,” I said and crawled on my hands and knees towards the flap in the shutter that I'd forgotten to close. My whole body was incredibly sore after having slept poorly. The strain of the day's 'exercise' was also finally making itself known, but I ignored it.

As I neared the open flap, I carefully stuck my head out through the narrow gap and looked at the street outside.

An enormous glowing foglight-like eye the size of a hubcap looked directly at me from outside in the street, where an enormous monster over forty feet long, with a rectangular body carried on dozens-upon-dozens of chubby human legs, was pushing its heavy body through the asphalt. It had skin, like that of a human, but looked as though it was stitched together from the bodies of forty different people. The windows on the former bus were like vaguely-transparent sheets of taut skin,

behind which writhed and clawed a boiling mass of ghastly figures that might once have been passengers, or were potentially the souls of those the bus had eaten.

A mouth with blocky molars opened below the giant eyes, then a loud ear-bleeding voice announced:

[NEXT STOP: YUMMY-YUMMY, A PLAYER WILL ENTER MY TUMMY!]