

## Chapter -62

“Will you stop sulking already!” Panda said, as we were sitting on the curb outside of the Police Headquarters.

I looked at the achievement that had popped up. Then I sighed.

“If the Chief isn’t here, then where could he be?”

“Forget your dumb revenge plans!”

“Never.”

<b>Congratulations! You have unlocked an achievement!</b> ✕
<i>‘Police Headquarters First Clear’</i> <b>Cleared the Police Headquarters for the first time.</b>
<i>As you may be realizing, we are no longer handing out Full Recovery rewards for clearing Dungeons once you surpass Level 10.</i>
<i>However, once you use the Safe Zone Sphere that was ejected from the Dungeon alongside you, you can set up a place to buy Full Recovery yourself using the GAME Coins.</i>
<b>Rewards:</b> <i>‘Instructor’s Soul Fragment’ &amp; 20x ‘GAME Coins’</i>

As soon as I clicked the X, a translucent blob of jelly landed in my lap and another achievement appeared:

<b>Congratulations! You have unlocked an achievement!</b> ✕
<i>‘Siren’s Lair First Clear’</i> <b>Cleared the Sub-Dungeon Siren’s Lair for the first time.</b>
<i>We somehow forgot to push ‘send’ on this achievement, when you beat the Siren’s Lair in such a disgusting and unintended fashion.</i>

*Yes, that’s right. There’s a team of people responsible for sending achievements to Players. We could automate it, but hiring people into simple menial jobs is how we’ve accomplished an above 95% employment rate!*

*And, of course, the lowly grunt who forgot to send the achievement has been **punished**, don’t you worry!*

**Rewards:** You already got them.

I shook my head. The more I learnt about the various departments of the insect people helping the Great Game, the more I thought it was the exact kind of dystopian society that earth had been steadily moving towards before the apocalypse happened.

“*Inspect*,” I said, while looking at the blob.

**‘Instructor’s Soul Fragment’** x

*A blob containing the twisted soul energy of the Instructor.*

*In order to unlock its hidden power, you must squeeze the blob between your hands until it pops.*

*I guess you can use your feet since you are missing an arm.*

**Weight:** 1 Panda

Bee, as always, was way ahead of me, her hands already covered in goo from popping the blob. Samantha was sitting a few feet away, looking at a spherical ball full of shifting eyes in a murky-blue liquid.

“What are you planning on doing with the Sphere?” I asked her.

“I’m gonna use it to turn Serenity Park Mall into a Safe Zone.”

“Why the Park Mall?”

“Because it’s big, indoors, and full of new dungeons. It’ll be a great way for groups of Players to help each other level up, and, according to the info on this thing, you can place it around dungeon entrances to prevent monsters from popping out.”

She’d given this a lot of thought already it seemed.

“What are you gonna do with the Sphere you’re getting?”

I shrugged. “No idea. I don’t really fancy staying in the same spot forever.”

“You can use it on a vehicle to make a Safe Zone on wheels.”

“What!?! Show me!” I got over and tried to take the Sphere from her hands.

“Fuck off, this one’s mine! Get your own ball to play with!”

“You two are like little kids,” Panda said.

I ignored him. “You’re helping me get the other one,” I told her.

“Yeah, yeah.”

I frowned. She sounded like she definitely wasn’t going to...

“That Dungeon was hell on my Insanity Gauge,” Samantha then said. “It’s already up to 34%...”

I didn’t tell her that at least 5% of that was thanks to me and instead returned to where Bee sat, humming while looking at the options offered by her boss reward.

Leaving the blob of soul matter on the ground where I’d dropped it, I squished it under the sole of my right foot. It popped like one of those stress balls that smelled like plastic and covered my foot in soul goop.

## **THAT’S HOT. I CAN’T WAIT TO SEE YOU CRUSH A SKULL LIKE THAT.**

“Gross, my Benefactor has a foot fetish,” I muttered, while trying to wipe my foot on the pavement, but the stuff wasn’t coming off.

<b>Choose your reward!</b> <small>x</small>
<i>This ability unlock was specifically designed for a faction of the GREAT GAME’s audience who has a goop fetish.</i>
<i>We would apologies for sexualizing you, except, we were paid so much for the inclusion of this item and similar objects that</i>

*we literally don't care what you feel. We're rich, baby! The replays alone will make up for our budget deficits!*

Pick one of the options:

‘Soul Blade’ | ‘Garand Cannon’ | ‘Furniture Wall’

“I think I can guess who makes up the majority of *that* faction,” Panda said.

“My Class reward looks weird,” I muttered, then clicked on the option to see what it was about.

‘Soul Blade’ x

*Unique Ability*

*Not gonna lie. This is a cool ability. It has very strong Antihero Protagonist vibes, and as such, no one else can receive this ability so long as you have it. However, if you are killed, they can take the ability directly from you.*

*Draw a blade formed of your own soul, the shape of which is unique to you, and which disappears after a single attack. It deals damage equal to all your Attributes combined.*

*If the blade takes damage, you also take damage.*

*Cooldown: 5 minutes*

***This ability appears on your Appraisal!***

I blinked in surprise. “Holy fuck,” I said and then immediately accepted the ability without looking at the other two options.

“Finally! A cool ability like I’ve been wanting all this time!” I exclaimed.

**Congratulations! You have unlocked an achievement!** x

<p><i>‘One of a Kind’</i></p> <p><b>Received a Unique Ability or Passive.</b></p>
<p><i>Ah, crap... our RNG System gave you a Unique Ability...</i></p> <p><i>We were really hoping this wouldn’t happen. Thankfully, it should result in you dying a lot sooner, which is a plus. Cause, you know, people will really want their hands on this ability.</i></p> <p><i>We are also obligated to give you this:</i></p>
<p><b>Reward: ‘Fusion Gum’</b></p>

A packet of the special gum appeared in my hand and I immediately threw it in my inventory. Since I had two of them now, it was probably time to use one.

But first.

I splayed the fingers of my left hand, even the broken ones, straightened my back, and then dramatically moved my hand around in a flourish, before touching the palm to the center of my bare torso.

“Behold!” I said excitedly.

Bee looked away from her screens, and Samantha turned to look as well.

“**Soul Blade!**” I yelled and drew my unique weapon from the very energy of my soul.

Light in a multitude of colors exploded outwards, coalescing in my hand into a curved shape. The way that it was shaped made me certain it was the exact kind of weapon I’d always wanted to possess, but which dozens of arrests and import restrictions had prevented me from owning. The kind of weapon that all men who indulged in fiction grew to love. The true symbol of a fedora-wielding trench-coat-wearing Edgelord.

The Ka—

“Is that a banana?” Samantha asked.

“Huh, you’re right, it *is* a banana,” commented Bee.

The blood drained from my face. I looked down at the shape in my hand. It was a three-foot-long curved brown-spotted yellow banana.

I gritted my teeth, almost on the verge of tears.

“It’s not that bad, buddy,” Panda said, trying to comfort me, but I could tell he was holding back laughter.

My hand on the curved handle stem of the banana tightened, and, as if a trigger was activated, the peel opened to reveal a curving yellow katana blade.

“Oh, thank the fathomless void!” I said in relief. “It’s not entirely lame!”

“It’s honestly still pretty lame,” Samantha said.

“I like the aesthetics of it,” Bee remarked, though I had no idea what she meant.

She got up and walked over to me, before poking the blade.

“It’s real metal,” she commented in surprise. “I expected it to feel like a normal banana.”

“Stop that,” I told her. “It feels weird, like you’re poking me in my *existence*.”

She withdrew her hand. “Sorry.”

“What skill did you get? A Unique one as well?”

“*That’s* a Unique skill?” Samantha asked, suddenly a lot more interested than before.

“I got one called Furniture Fortification, it allows me to summon furniture from around me to build stuff. I thought about getting another offensive skill, but I’m low on utility.”

“Good idea,” I told her. “Although I’m a bit sad to see you stray from the path of the Glass Cannon.”

“Panda’s words stuck with me,” she said. “Also...”

“What?” I asked, suddenly worried because of her tone.

“I hit level 10!”

“Nice!”

“Don’t do your Class choice here,” Samantha warned. She was looking around and I noticed what she’d seen as well: plenty of Players were coming out from around the buildings.

I equipped my Carapace Suit with a few mental gestures, then said, “We should go to this Safe Zone Samantha will set up before we go after the Mayor. Apparently I can heal up there.”

“I’ll wait to evolve until then,” Bee decided.

Samantha nodded, the pen that she’d returned her weapon to was in her hand, as though she expected some of the Players to attack us. Her left hand was still half-gone, so she hadn’t received a Full Recovery either, which was at least fair, I thought.

However, the Players didn’t seem overtly hostile. Instead they seemed excited that she’d gotten the Safe Zone Sphere that was still in her hand.

I wondered how they knew, but then I saw a notice that’d been pushed aside by all the pop-ups and clung to the bottom-right of my vision. When I focused on it, it popped up with the message:

**WORLD FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT!**

**Player ‘Samantha’ is the first person to obtain a Safe Zone Sphere in the GREAT GAME!**

**For the next twenty-four hours, she is marked with a glowing beacon, so that anyone who wishes to join her Safe Zone can find her!**

**She is currently located in front of the Downtown Police Headquarters in the city of Castleburg, Massachusetts, in the United States!**

**On an unrelated note, killing other Players lets you take ownership of their rare items, such as the Safe Zone Sphere. You would not believe all the things it is capable of!**

“We should probably get to the Mall quick, so you can set up the Safe Zone, before anyone tries to kill you for the Sphere,” I commented, looking up into the air to see the glowing pillar that stretched into the sky above her head.

Samantha nodded, waving to a few of the Players coming closer.

“Do you have a movement ability?” I asked her.

“I’ve got some running shoes from a Dungeon.”

“That’ll do I guess.” Then I said, “Skater Boy!” to bring out my longboard. I stuffed the banana katana back into my chest where it was reabsorbed. It was a strange but pleasant feeling, as though I was returning some missing part of myself to where it belonged.

“Beetle Blastoff!” Bee said and took to the sky.

“Sam, you lead the way.”

“Stop calling me that,” she said, then quickly swapped her ruined dark-blue suit for a new one, and replacing her heels with some hot pink Nike-looking sneakers. She knelt down into a starting stance, as though she was taking part in a 100 Meter Dash, then kicked off and shot down the street, running along the asphalt parallel to the large groove made by Chika Hitokui.

“She’s fast!” Bee commented from above, before pushing herself through the air to follow.

I looked around at the Players gathered in front of the Dungeon entrance with disdain. They were the type of bottom-feeders that couldn’t even help themselves, only following behind those with any

sort of power in the hopes of scraps being left behind for them. Of course, the people Bee and I had saved were amongst them.

With a kick off the ground, I rolled after the pair, doing a few simple tricks to boost my speed, with the sentient board making cringy words of affirmation every time.

I suddenly remembered something that Nina had said: *‘The birdcage has a hole in the floor and the crows of death sing at midnight.’*

“Panda, do you think ‘Birdcage’ could mean ‘Safe Zone’ in Nina-speak?”

“I was just thinking the same thing,” he replied.