

Chapter -49

Question #1: *What is the population of Castleburg?*

Your answer must be within 500 of the actual number.

“I think that’s a trick question,” I said. “There were 13,600 people alive when I did the last Dungeon-Break, but that’s divided between Madeville, Castleburg, and the smaller towns around.”

“Before the apocalypse, Castleburg had 80 thousand or so, with Madeville at 27. I don’t know about the other towns. We also don’t know how hard each place was hit, so there might be an overrepresentation of Madeville vs. Castleburg. Therefore, my guess is 6,300.”

I nodded, having no clue how she arrived at that number.

“Add 42 to that,” Panda said.

“Our answer is: 6,342!”

Correct!

The answer is: 6,837

“You really save us there, Panda,” I remarked.

“Still 9 questions left, we’re not out of the woods yet!”

Question #2: *What is the name of the Mayor of Castleburg’s dog?*

I sighed. “It’s another trick question. He doesn’t have a dog.”

Bee spoke up, “Our answer is: He doesn’t have a dog!”

Correct!

Mayor Noah Sullivan’s dog was killed when a madman suffering from paranoid schizophrenic delusions broke into his private residence.

Question #3: *Who killed the Mayor’s dog?*

“Gambit did,” Panda answered.

Bee gasped. “You killed a dog!?”

I frowned. “I didn’t. I’d never hurt an animal. I’m not a goddamn serial killer.”

“Then who did?” Panda asked, jabbing me in the stomach with his plushie arm. He was walking freely around on the backseats, while Bee and I were ostensibly tied up by the seatbelts. She was giving me a new kind of look: judgement. Never before in my life had I wanted to be proven more innocent than right then and there.

“Our answer is: The Chief of Police!” I said, brimming with conviction.

Correct!

Mayor Noah Sullivan’s dog was killed by Liam Johnson, the Chief of Police, in order to frame the madman known as [REDACTED].

“I fucking knew it!” I yelled excitedly.

“...Huh,” Panda muttered. “Definitely didn’t see that one coming.”

“I knew you wouldn’t kill a dog,” Bee said in relief. “If you had, I would’ve smothered you the next time you went to sleep.”

I nodded. “That’s fair.”

Question #4: *How many people have your actions as a Player in the GREAT GAME doomed?*

Your answer must be within 10 of the actual number.

I groaned. “It’s probably going to say a really high number.”

“Our guess is: 0!” Bee yelled without consulting us.

Correct!

The Player known as ‘Bee’ is not responsible for anyone being doomed, as she does not count as a Player in the GREAT GAME.

The Player known as ‘Gambit’ is a System Glitch and thus an accurate tally is impossible to make.

“Are all these just trick questions?” Panda wondered.

“I’m having fun,” Bee said excitedly.

“I wonder if we get a reward if we answer them all correctly.”

“Perhaps there’s a way to get help from the audience or to phone a friend,” Bee said, really getting into it.

Players who take part in “Who Wants to Survive the Ride?” have the ability to ‘Ask the Audience’ for help in the form of a poll, and they may also ‘Call A Player’, so long as said Player is alive.

“That’s useful,” she said. “Alright, let’s go for all ten correct!”

I smiled. Despite the fact that losing this Taxi game would mean death, I was glad that we both got a bit of downtime from fighting or being chased. It definitely wasn’t going to last once we reached Downtown, so it was important to cherish it now.

Question #5: *3 other Players besides ‘Gambit’ completed the WEAPONLUTION EVENT. What was the final weapon of the Player who finished 4th?*

“Hm, who was number 4?” I wondered. I hadn’t paid close enough attention to the scoreboard presented in the most recent announcement.

“It was Tina & Nina,” Bee answered.

“She had a double-barrel shotgun with a bayonet and which shot acidic spikes,” Panda recounted effortlessly. “But that wasn’t her final weapon.”

“We’d like to ‘Call A Player’,” I said to the Taxi.

**You have chosen ‘Call A Player’:
Which Player would you like to call?**

“Tina & Nina,” I answered.

There followed a few beats of silence, before a dial tone blared through the speakers in the doors, as well as from the radio on the other side of the dividing glass panel, where a ghostly finger had managed to write ‘DONT TRUST THE AUDIENCE’.

[“Hello?”] answered a sweet voice, while the sound of screaming was abruptly cut off in the background. [“Who is this? I just received a strange pop-up like a phone call.”]

“Hi Tina,” I replied.

[“You sound familiar,”] she said.

“It’s me, Gambit, from Calm Springs.”

[“Oh! Hi! How are you doing!? Is Pandamonium still with you?”]

Panda shivered at the mention of his name and did a series of gestures to indicate that I shouldn’t mention him.

“Yeah, he’s right here with me. And we’re doing fine. We’re in a Taxi at the moment and was hoping to get your help with a question.”

[“Oh, I tried one of those! It was so much fun!! What’s the question you’re stuck on?”]

“We need to know what your final weapon was in the last event.”

[“I see. Let me put Nina on the phone.”]

I swallowed hard, knowing what was coming.

There was mostly silence on the other end, though it was possible to hear faintly-whispered words.

“Hi Nina...?” I said cautiously.

[“***The birdcage has a hole in the floor and the crows of death sing at midnight!***”]

[“***The lost child is found in the temple, when the crestfallen hero gets his revenge!***”]

[“***The herald tells only lies and the judge can be trusted!***”]

“I see,” I replied. “Thank you for the warnings. Can you tell us what weapon you had when you finished the Weaponlution Event?”

[“***A dragon that breathes acid and spits out its teeth!***”]

“Gotcha, thanks!”

There was a *click* as the call ended.

“Is she always like that?” Bee asked. She looked kind of spooked.

“Nina is pretty intense,” Panda explained, “and only seems to speak in riddles.”

“The weirdest thing is that, once you figure out what she’s saying, there’s always a real meaning to them. Before the apocalypse, she kept saying that the ‘Children of Stars and the Insects of Show Business’ were going to ‘lay claim to this world’. She also once warned me about one of the orderlies planning to beat me up. I didn’t realize that was what she’d meant until after it happened though.”

“So that stuff with the birdcage, crows, child, temple, crestfallen hero, herald, and judge all means something?”

I nodded. “Probably, yeah.”

“The Crestfallen Hero might be Logan Maximillian,” Panda guessed.

“Does that mean the ‘lost child’ is me?” Bee wondered.

“That does make some manner of sense,” I replied. “But no idea what temple it’d be referring to. There isn’t really anything like that in Castleburg as far as I know.”

“The Judge has to be an Adjudicator, right?” Panda continued guessing.

“I’m more worried about this ‘Birdcage,’” I said. “Makes me think of a prison. Also, if Logan is the Crestfallen, then I suppose we should expect him to seek revenge.”

“Given that you killed his sister and failed to kill him, as he clearly finished the Weaponlution Event, I’d say it’d be pretty obvious. But he’s still in Madeville, so I doubt it’ll be an issue anytime soon.”

“We’ll just kill him before he kills us,” Bee replied confidently.

“He has powerful Protagonist vibes, so we need to be careful if he does attack us,” I said.

“Anyway, what’s the answer to the question?” Bee wondered.

I smiled, having long ago learnt how to decode most of the ways that Nina described things. “Our answer is: A Flamethrower that shoots acidic spikes.”

Correct!

The final weapon of #4-ranked Player ‘Tina & Nina’ was an acid-spike-shooting flamethrower.

The taxi hit a bump in the road and went airborne for a moment, before landing with a jolt that nearly bounced my head off the ceiling. Then, as if nothing had happened, the game continued.

I frowned as I saw the next question.