

Chapter -25

“—ucker!” I yelled, my voice echoing down the hallway littered with corpses. Then the next evolution choice appeared:

Weaponlution — Level 6		
Longsword +8in Length +50% Impact +50% Weight	Rapier +7in Length +60% Stabbing -40% Slashing	Balloon +250% Impact -90% Weight -100% Cutting -100% Slashing -100% Stabbing

“*My fakkin body!! What have ya done!?*” Brock squealed, seeing how his metallic ‘flesh’ had turned purple. For some reason it also now had a ribbed texture on the grip, which made it feel like I was holding a cheap plastic sex toy.

“Might as well pick the ‘Balloon’ evolution and just give up now,” Panda commented.

“*If ya turn me into a balloon, I’ll never forgive it!!*”

“Well, prepare to hold a grudge then,” I said and moved my finger towards the option.

“Gambit! I was joking! Don’t do it!”

I paused. “Think about how powerful the Balloon Swords in the Playroom were. Coupled with my high strength, it should make any hit fatal.”

Panda seemed to mull it over as I turned to Brock, reassuring him, “You might think cutting and stabbing is the best way to shower in blood, but what about pulverization? It’ll be like squeezing a tomato with a hydraulic press.”

“*You know how to woo a girl, Nigel.*”

“...You’re a woman?”

“*You certain you want the truth?*”

“Definitely not,” I said, tapping the ‘Balloon’ option just to change the subject.

“I still think it’s a bad idea,” Panda managed to get out before the window disappeared and Brock began to undergo a transformation.

The twenty-two-inch shortsword began to expand, as its metallic blade filled with air and its material became transparent latex. The purple color only intensified as the crossguard inflated and a second later the handle grew thicker as well. Then, with a *squeak* the entire weapon changed structure. The blade became like the twisted kind of blade I’d seen on the Balloon Swords in the Playroom, while the crossguard became like an infinity symbol around it.

“...If you’d have let me finish, I would’ve pointed out that the weapon can easily be popped.”

“Too late now.”

The most noticeable change, apart from the obvious visual aspect, was that the weight of the weapon had reduced to the point that, if I threw it, it might stay in the air if there was even a slight breeze.

“*I feel weird.*”

“You’ll get used to it.”

“*Me willy’s all twisted now.*”

Panda groaned, then said, “Gambit, don’t forget about your shoulder wound.”

I looked down myself and noticed that my entire left side was soaked in my own blood. Clearly it wasn’t going to heal by itself.

After sitting down on the floor next to the dead yellow raincoat guy who’d wielded a gatling gun, I pulled out the Survival Kit. As I opened it, I eyed the Gatorade and sandwich that I’d noticed before and decided to get some sustenance in my body, since I hadn’t eaten in ages, apart from a bit of the giant pineapple pizza.

I bit down on one of the stale and cold curry-covered meatballs, only to immediately spit it out again.

“...Why does that taste of synthetic grape?”

“Really? Let me taste,” Panda said and reached for the sandwich. He *somehow* took a bite, though I dared not comprehend the means by which he accomplished it. Then he swallowed and said, “Strange, but overall not bad.”

I scarfed down the sandwich, even picking up the half-chewed meatball I’d spat out and eating that too. It was super nasty, but hunger is one hell of a flavor additive.

“At least I have the Gatorade,” I said and popped the annoying cap off, before sucking down a mouthful.

The mouthful of the sports drink stayed unswallowed for a long moment as I processed my new reality, then I quickly forced it all down and sat staring into the air aimlessly for a long while.

“Gambit, are you okay? Did the grape sandwich poison you or something?”

“It’s not just the sandwich,” I said.

“What?”

“The drink also tastes like grape...”

“That’s a weird lunch to pack,” he commented.

I reached over to my wounded shoulder and got some of the blood on my index finger, then stuck it in my mouth.

A deep sigh escaped from my body.

“I don’t think I can go on like this.”

“Why? What’s wrong??”

“Panda... everything tastes of grape now.”

“Uh oh.”

Time remaining:

5.02048453E-6 millennium

Kills remaining:

19

The taste of synthetic grape was still there, clinging to the saliva in my mouth, as I wandered aimlessly up a slope of narrow steps in a tunnel with a very low ceiling. I hadn’t seen any other Players, mantids, nor even creepy eyeball drones for a long while. The ruined part of my suit and the shirt beneath showed a bit of the shoddy stitching I’d made to heal the wound and stem the bleeding. In comparison, the stomach wound that Bee had sown up was much prettier.

My body was exhausted, as the lack of sleep was starting to catch up to me and, after such a long uneventful period following my last fight, the adrenaline and cortisol high had long since evaporated.

“I hate this place. Fuck this event. They oughta put it somewhere more interesting, rather than these dull ruins. And it’s too damn big with nothing going on!”

“At this rate, you might run out of time before you get all the necessary kills,” Panda commented.

I pulled out the Pocket-Watch and showed the time left to him.

“43 hours, 58 minutes, and 8 seconds remaining of the event.”

I realized that enough time had passed for my mapping ability to come off its cooldown.

“*Dungeon...*” I said, revealing the map of my surroundings. The strange tunnel I was crawling up had a bright light at the end, and I could hear whispered voices coming my way.

ACTIVATING DUNGEON MAP

Nearest Player: 105 yards

Nearest Enemy: 2311 yards

Nearest Boss: N/A

Nearest Exit: N/A

On the map, I saw how the area I was coming up on had several golden-yellow dots all near each other. Either I was walking up on a Mexican Standoff, or I had found peaceful Players.

I carefully crawled up the last bit of the tunnel, before I poked my head out of the end and saw a room that definitely didn't fit in with the rest of the place.

Eight people, four of which stood guard and quickly noticed me, were congregated in front of four colored doors. Amateurish cardboard signs were plastered on the walls around the doors, saying things like: ‘*Free Treasure!*’, ‘*Definitely not a trap!*’, and ‘*100% Safe Hallway*’. They looked like a six-year-old had made them.

“Show us your weapon!” screamed a woman, aiming an unevolved flintlock at me, with the three other people, all men, aiming their guns at me too. Only two of the eight Players in front of me were holding guns that had evolved, meaning everyone else had yet to get a kill.

“I know what you're thinking Gambit: You noticed their weapons and believe you can win in a fight against them. But don't you dare try it. It's clearly suicide.”

I didn't like how in tune with my thoughts Panda was.

To show that I came in peace, I lifted my purple balloon sword up above my head, wriggling my shoulders, and saying, “Friendly! Friendly! Don't shoot!”

The people all turned to look at me, three of the four who weren't guarding getting up and readying their weapons.

“Where's your gun?” asked a young man in his early twenties.

I waved the sword around. “'Tis all I got.”

It was clear they didn't believe me, so I got out of the tunnel, placed Brock on the floor in front of me, then took off all my clothes so that I was only wearing my underwear.

“See. I'm clean.”

—Patreon-exclusive Copy—
—Kristoffer Pauly (aka “Dosei”)—

“...You didn’t have to show them your boxers,” Panda complained.