

Chapter -15

“Bee? Are you okay?” I asked cautiously. From what the Looking Glass appraisal had shown me, she had gained a Class called ‘Beetle Girl’, but the System didn’t seem to know if she was an Enemy or not.

“My body hurts a lot,” she complained. “And all my joints are very stiff.”

“Well, they *are* covered in chitin,” Panda said.

“Panda, shut up.”

Bee looked terrified at what she had become, but that exact mannerism was what made her still seem human, despite the obvious changes.

“I unlocked some Achievements: ‘*Insane in the Membrane*’; ‘*Bugkin*’, which praised my appearance and called my carapace beautiful...; and ‘*Classy*’, which gave me three skills.”

“What are they?”

“‘*Beetle Breeze*’, which sounds like gliding that apparently uses my... *wings*. ‘*Beetle Brawn*’, a Passive that increases my Defense and Strength by twenty percent. And ‘*Beetle Bolt*’, which allows me to fire a small stinger from my palm, somehow.”

“That sounds pretty good,” I remarked.

“A lot of alliteration,” Panda commented.

“I wonder why I didn’t lose my mind. I watched someone outside turn into a skeleton after he went insane, and all the skin and flesh melted off his body. He became violent and started attacking everyone.”

“I checked you with my Looking Glass and it seems like Wayward Minors like you aren’t supposed to be able to turn into monsters, let alone go insane...”

“You went insane too right, so why do you look human?”

I shrugged.

“I kind of want to try out my new powers,” she said, sounding enthusiastic for the first time since I’d met her. Although, the fact that she was so quick to overcome the terror of turning into a monster was a bit disconcerting.

I grinned. “Then let’s go find some stuff to kill!”

GAME EVENT ANNOUNCEMENT!

The first EVENT of the GREAT GAME will begin in exactly 1 hour!

Mandatory Participation is in effect!

“Well, shit... If we don’t get out of here by then, I won’t get a Full Recovery to have my arm returned...”

“Maybe they’ll heal everyone before their Event?” Bee guessed.

“Let’s not rely on such mercy from these guys,” I replied.

I tried to retain my enthusiasm from moments prior, as we made our way through the hallway leading out of the rectangular room with the Workshop Door. However, I couldn’t shake the building dread of what the System and the Great Game’s orchestrators had in store for us. If everything I’d already seen was anything to go by, a lot of people would die. What worried me most was the several mentions of this thing being broadcasted somehow. The implications were gruesome, since it meant that our struggles and deaths were all for the entertainment of others, as though we were slaves in a colosseum.

The hallway led to a carpeted room filled with teddy bears... the human-sized ones.

“Careful,” I told Bee. “These might all be enemies.”

“What? All of them?” she scanned the room. “There’s like more than thirty.”

No sooner had the words left her mouth than some of them started coming to life.

“You get to try out your Beetle Bolt, isn’t that nice?” Panda said cheerfully.

“Don’t let them get near you. Oh, and aim for the heads,” I told her and began running for the closest one, pulling my left arm back.

As it began charging for me with its arms out, I hopped to the side and jabbed my fist into its head, producing a squelching *crunch* on impact and sending the bear to the floor.

“Watch out!” Bee yelled, as another one was right on me, but, before I could defend myself, a buzzing drill sound preceded *something*, which sheared through one of its stitched eyes and instantly killed it.

I watched in surprise as the large plushie fell to the floor, then turned to look back at the girl.

“Did *you* do that!?”

“Yes! It came out of my hand somehow!?”

“That was really cool!”

“Thank you! Oh, watch out, two more!”

I instinctively hopped sideways, just as a bear charged past, stumbling as it missed its attempted grab. The one behind it received the heel of my shoe to its nose, the impact of which left a crater. I quickly followed this up with a punch directly in the same spot, sending an explosion of red fluff everywhere.

I heard the buzzing sound again and saw the other bear get pierced through by two back-to-back Beetle Bolts, though the aim was wonky, so it remained alive. Before it could charge for my new friend, I rammed into it and sent us both to the floor. It began struggling against my weight, and was somehow stronger than me, despite its soft body. Its struggles didn’t last long though, as a third Bolt went through its head, killing it.

“Careful!” I yelled to her. “You could’ve hit me!”

“Sorry! I’m having a lot of fun though!”

“She’s psychotic, just like you,” Panda mused, sounding excited about the fact.

I hopped off the back of the dead bear, but no sooner had I gotten back to my feet than I was grabbed from behind and squeezed in a vice grip.

“Argh, fuck! Let go of me!” I yelled, as the pressure on my arm and torso started producing uncomfortable *pops* and *cracks* from my body, as though I was in one of those horrendous ‘chiropractor’ videos.

My struggles were not enough to break free, despite my high Strength attribute, which was probably due to my missing arm. A buzzing drill sound filled my ears, before a projectile flew right between my legs, uncomfortably-close to Lil’ Gambit. The sound of tearing fabric came from the bear that held me and it quickly lost its balance, allowing me to wrestle free, before stomping on its head with my heel.

Crunch!

Three more bears came at me, but Bee and I quickly dispatched them.

When it was clear that no more monsters would rise from the pile of teddy bears, I fell to my ass on the carpet with a sigh of relief.

Congratulations! You have leveled up! ^x	
You have reached Level -5!	
+1 new Attribute Point available to invest!	
<i>Kills required for Level -6</i>	<i>4/15</i>

Congratulations! You have unlocked an achievement! ^x
<i>‘¿Level Up (-5)?’</i> Reached Level -5
<i>We’re still waiting on the agents to catch you and figure out this mystery, but, until then, you’ve unlocked...</i> <i>oh...</i> <i>oh no...</i>
Reward: ‘...Break’ Ability

I tapped on the name of the ability I was rewarded from hitting Level -5 and it brought up a strange description:

‘...Break’ ^x
<i>Ability</i> <i>The first half of this ability seems to be missing, though it can still be utilized in this state.</i> <i>Target any non-living item, object, or other and break it down to its individual atoms.</i> <i>Cooldown: 12 hours</i>

“First ability with a Cooldown I’ve seen,” I mumbled.

“Did you level up as well?” Bee asked, coming over. I noticed how the palm of her right hand had a strange spiraling hole in the center, kind of like what I’d seen from the Beetle Agents who shot flechettes at me.

“I did. I’m Level -5 now.”

“I hit Level 2. I’ve got points to invest now, but I’m not sure what to put them in.”

“Can’t go wrong with Vitality,” I said. “It increases your Stamina and Health.”

She seemed to consider it as she sat down opposite me, while looking at what I assumed was her Status screen.

“My Beetle Bolt uses Mana, which is based on either Intelligence or Wisdom, as far as I can tell. It seems my limit is six shots right now, because I fired five and started feeling woozy.”

“How do you get Mana back?” I asked.

“No idea. I thought maybe you knew.”

“He has ‘literally zero’ Mana,” Panda remarked.

“Oh...”

“Maybe if you meditate, you’ll recoup spent Mana?”

“...Meditate??” she asked, as though that was the most insane thing she’d ever been told.

“Are you out of your mind, Gambit??” Panda joined in.

“Why am I even putting up with this toxic harassment?” I wondered to myself.

“Oh, I have a choice of skills from a level-up achievement,” Bee then suddenly said.

“What did you invest your points in?”

“I did a point in both Wisdom and Intelligence.”

I brought my Status up, thought about it for a moment, then put my available point in Athleticism.

Level -5		‘Gambit’		<i>System Glitch</i> ^x	
STATS					
Health: Not, Not ‘Good’		Stamina: ちょっと		Armor: Plastic Bottle Suit	
Carry Weight: 1000 Pandas		Top Speed: Mountain Bike		Mana: Literally Zero	
ATTRIBUTES					
Strength: 2300 lbs.		Dexterity: Platypus		Intelligence: TBD	
Vitality: Tomahawk		Wisdom: N/A		Defense: Plastic Bottle	
Athleticism: 蝙蝠		Perception: ‘Yes?’			
ABILITIES			PASSIVES		
‘Punch.harder()’ ‘...Break’			‘Glitch’ ‘Insanity’ ‘Inanimate Voices’ ‘Math.multiply(Punch)’ ‘BIRTHDAY_SUIT’		

“Hey, Bee, is your Status screen complete garbage as well?”

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“Like, does it say weird stuff?”

“It’s a lot of numbers, if that’s what you mean?”

“...Oh, nevermind. I guess it’s just me that’s got a bungled one then.”

Panda nodded. “It has Japanese text and compares his Vitality to meat dishes.”

“What about your Wisdom and Intelligence, what do those say?”

“To-be-determined and Not-applicable...”

“What happens if you put points in them?”

“I can’t, it gives me an error if I try...”

“Is it trying to keep you dumb?”

Panda burst out laughing.

I gingerly pulled him off my shoulder with my left hand and then sat him on Bee’s lap. “You can have this guy. I think I’m pretty much done with him.”

“Hey! Don’t be mad because she’s speaking the truth!”

“Panda, you’re a bully.”

He put his fingerless arms on his hips and looked up at me with his beady eyes. “Are you really going to abandon your best friend to a girl you just met??”

“You’re not my best friend,” I replied.

Panda looked shocked.

“Gambit... that was pretty mean,” Bee said, patting the plushie on his head.

“Don’t forget that looking at him with the Looking Glass literally made you insane...”

“He’s just misunderstood,” she replied, ignoring my words.

“All the girls wanna fix me,” Panda answered with a self-satisfied nod.

“Alright, enough of this nonsense. Let’s get out of here.”

“How?” Bee asked, looking up at me as I got to my feet.

“The System gifted me with an ability that should do the trick,” I told her.