

## Chapter -99

The top half of the mask was in the bathtub on the third-floor. Or, more accurately, on the face of a dead Cultist lying in a bathtub full of blood... It was made of silver like the other half and had two narrow slits for eyes to look through.

<b>‘Silver Mask Fragment (top)’</b>	x
<i>The top fragment of a mask made from silver.</i>	
<i>Perhaps it can be used for something if you find the other half.</i>	
<b>Weight: 1 Panda</b>	

I pulled out the bottom-half and tried to stick them together.

But nothing happened.

“Hmm...” I grumbled annoyed.

“Maybe there’s like a special pedestal for it?” Bee wondered.

“Just like in Resident Evil!” I exclaimed. “You’re a genius!”

She looked to Panda for an explanation, but he just shook his soft head.

“Now, *where* would they be hiding such a thing?” I muttered, looking around the bathroom.

The floor was tiled with white and black diamond-shaped marble tiles, and the bathtub was a rounded old-looking porcelain thing with silver claws lifting it off the ground. On the floor were bloody footprints leading towards the bathtub, but aside from that the rest of the room was normal, or well, as normal as the rest of the interior of this Cult Clubhouse.

“Let’s try downstairs,” Panda advised. “You mentioned a basement.”

“Before the Great Game, the Mayor only had a wine cellar, but I’m willing to bet there’s something more down there now.”

“I didn’t see any stairs leading down from the ground floor,” Bee commented.

I grinned. “That can only mean *one thing*.”

Her face curled into a smile as well, “A secret door!”

We both ran out of the bathroom towards the stairwell leading down. It was made of white-painted wood and curled around forty-five degrees as it descended to the second floor, with the steps creaking slightly as we hurried down.

Through a window, I saw that there was still fighting going on outside the mansion, but it seemed fairly clear that the Cultists had killed at least a couple of the Players, as the large mob was only focused around two people: the Raincoat Angel and the Healer.

We continued moving down the next forty-five-degree spiral staircase to the first floor, but as soon as we reached the bottom, we ran right into the two other Players from Raincoat’s group: the Knight and the Bowler chick.

The woman had lost her bowling ball and pin, and she was bleeding profusely from two parallel stab-wounds in her abdomen. The Knight’s armor was dented and scratched, with a few puncture-holes here-and-there, though none of his wounds were as life-threatening as the woman’s.

“That’s why you don’t wear a basketball jersey as protection,” Panda remarked.

“You!” roared the Knight, the voice muffled and deepened by the close-helm that had a slit for the eyes to look out of above the ‘beak’ covering the mouth. It was, surprisingly, a woman’s voice.

I pointed a finger at her, although it was swallowed up by my excess sleeve. “Don’t you ‘*You!*’ me! You’re the ones chasing *me* for no reason!”

“You killed Ophelia and Logan!”

“They challenged us to a fight,” Bee protested. “It’s not our fault they were weak!”

“Everyone knows Gambit is a cheater! Twine said so!” retorted the Knight. Meanwhile, Bowler chick was dying in her arms.

“Listen, we don’t have time to kill you, so just go somewhere else to die,” I told her.

“You’re not going anywhere, murderer!”

I sighed and took a step forward, punching Brock into the air in front of me.

The impact exploded the end of my right sleeve and sent a powerful blast into the middle of the Knight’s body, tossing her and her dying friend down along the hallway that led to a garden patio. They slid along the floor most of the way, and the Knight was struggling to get back onto her feet, giving us enough time to find the secret entrance.

As we left, she roared after us, but it was to no avail.

“Let’s go find that basement!” I said.

“You’re just going to leave them like that?” Panda asked, confused.

“They’re already dead,” I replied, although I also just felt bad about beating on someone whose friend was dying in their arms. “Ugh, is this what morals feel like? It’s so sticky and gross.”

Bee followed me into a 60’s-styled totally-white-painted kitchen, where cold-cuts of bloody meat were prepared on platters, and red liquid was filled into wine glasses. All the utensils was silver, along with all the knives and other tools hanging around the walls.

I scratched my head, looking around frantically, while awaiting the Knight’s return, as it was clear the woman valued death at my hands more than the life of her friend. One thing I’d noticed belatedly, was that the steady stream of Cultists had stopped, which explained why the two Players could get inside the mansion.

“There used to be a narrow staircase down to a wine cellar in here, before it was changed.”

Bee was eyeing a round table with six chairs and placemats, for some reason.

I began looking through the cupboards, shelves, and refrigerator for any hidden switches that might reveal a trapdoor or something. This mostly just meant scooping my arms along the shelves and throwing everything down onto the floor.

Meanwhile, Bee was placing items on the round table.

“What are you doing?” I asked her, looking over my shoulder.

“There’s a pattern here, but it’s missing *something*,” she said, staring intently at the table.

I stopped emptying the freezer of frozen slabs of meat and went over to look at the table as well. It seemed that a few things were missing, like utensils and napkins.

“Maybe we have to fully prepare it?” I asked her.

“You might also have to place the cold-cuts on the plates and pour the ‘wine’ into the glasses,” Panda guessed.

“Good thinking,” Bee said, and we immediately began setting the table.

While we were doling out even portions of the cold-cuts, two Cultists walked into the kitchen.

Bee and I froze, but then she said, “It’s the people from earlier.”

“We’ll help you,” said one of them, a man with a high-pitched voice. Their faces were obscured by the darkness of their hoods.

“There are other Players here,” Bee told them, “So be careful.”

The four of us quickly finished decorating the table, and the Moth Magician eyed it for a while, before lifting something that’d been placed in the very center between the six plates: a small silver bell.

*DING!*

The reverberations of the bell sounded throughout the entire mansion, and a beat of silence followed, before tremors shook the floor. The sound of scraping stone came from outside the room.

“The staircase!” I said, and we ran back to where we’d come from, leaving the two disguised Players in the kitchen.

As we came back out into the hallway with the stairwell, I saw that the floor below the spiraling stairs had opened up with stone steps leading down below the Mansion. At the other end of the hallway, the Knight was using a sewing kit to patch up the Bowler chick, but it was too late, as the woman’s eyes and limbs were lifeless.

She looked up and saw us, then screamed furiously. A second later, the Healer and Matthew Twine appeared behind her.

“Oh shit,” I muttered. “Bee get down into the basement, I’ll handle this!”

She didn’t leave my side and instead pointed her hands towards them and yelled, “Furniture Fortification!”

Chairs, cupboards, benches, paintings, statues, lamps, and other random junk flew out of the rooms joining the hallway, absolutely clogging up the middle of it and blocking the Players from our view.

“Now we go,” she told me.

“I still don’t get why we’re running,” I replied, but nonetheless followed her down the steps into the darkness below.

The stairs led down for a while, before evening out into a dark stone hallway that was lined with torches lit by fire. The atmosphere was completely different from the rest of the Mansion, but still had some proper Cult vibes going on.

We ran to the end of the hallway and were met with a round room that had no other exits. In the center was a skeleton sitting in a silver throne and wearing red robes with the hood up. Its head was leaned back, as though awaiting *something*.

“The mask!” I realized, pulling out the pieces and placing the bottom-half on its face. It snapped to the skeleton’s bottom jaw like a magnet.

The sound of running footsteps echoed down the stone hallway and I quickly placed the top-half, which flew onto the skeleton’s face with a powerful tug out of my hands. Stock laughter immediately filled the room, and the floor began to tremble and rotate.

Down the way we’d come, the three Players chasing me were briefly visible, before the turning room closed off the hallway and opened up another path directly opposite. The skeleton in the throne had done a full 180 spin.

<b>Congratulations! You have unlocked an achievement!</b> <sup>x</sup>
<i>‘Puzzle Me This’</i> <b>Completed a puzzle in a Dungeon.</b>
<i>The <b>Dungeon Architect Termites</b> are very pleased to see you not breaking this particular Dungeon, as they put a lot of effort into it. They are still quite upset about you breaking the <b>Dungeon Barrier of the Challenge Dungeon</b>, but they are willing to let it slide if you don’t do it again.</i>
<i>Also, you might be saying, ‘Didn’t I already do a puzzle in another Dungeon?’ And the truth is, you might have, but not all of them count for achievements like this. Don’t ask me why. The System decides the rules here. We just follow them.</i>
<b>Rewards:</b> 15x ‘Game Coins’ & ‘Puzzle Box’

“I guess that deals with them for now,” I commented. “Although I could’ve just killed them.”

“I do agree that we’re just delaying the inevitable,” Panda added.

“Maybe it’s because of the Moth Mania making me see patterns everywhere, but I think we shouldn’t kill off all the powerful Players in our Region. Yes, Gambit is powerful, but there will no doubt be things he can’t defeat on his own at some point.”

I scoffed.

“I’m serious!” she said.

“Fine, I get your point, but we already lost Samantha, and while Logan and his sister might’ve been able to do a lot of good, they decided to use their powers like tyrants. The Police Chief’s bodyguard was no different. And Raincoat Kid and Co. won’t stop pursuing me.”

“Fine, let them keep hunting us. Their drive for revenge will make them stronger.”

“Damn, Bee, that’s pretty twisted,” Panda commented.

“No, she’s got a point. Revenge is good.”

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

“It most definitely isn’t,” the plushie replied all-knowingly, but I just ignored him.