

Chapter -24

The 2.5D map blinked out of existence as I rounded a corner and came to a cross-section of two paths. From diligently studying the map, I knew the way I had to go, so I made my way down the right.

“Gambit, you moron, it’s straight-ahead! How many times do I have to correct you on this?? You couldn’t even pick the correct path with the map out!”

“The Cricket is right, I’ve seen Koalas with a better sense of direction than you, and they’re goddamn morons!”

“Thanks guys, this is really helping matters. Can’t you just say, ‘*At the next intersection, turn left*’?”

“What am I, a glorified Satnav??”

“I bet you memorized the map already.”

I could feel as Panda straightened up on my shoulder, swelling with pride. “It was elementary, my dear Watson.”

“You’re meant to be Sherlock? Really??”

“Too much of a stretch?”

“You look more like Poirot.”

“I’ll settle for that, mon ami.”

“Me willy’s dry, chop-chop.”

“Please stop calling your blade *that*,” Panda and I both told Brock.

The commotion we’d caused suddenly drew the attention of *something* a few hallways away, as I heard the tapping of legs upon the smooth floor. In my mind I imagined the Ambushers were spiders. Spiders were going to show up sooner or later, I was certain of it, and it seemed to fit the name here.

I picked up the pace and moved down the straight-ahead, which led to a left-turn and then a T-junction.

“Left again,” Panda said, and I followed his guidance.

The tapping of legs disappeared, but I couldn’t tell if it was because it had moved too far away for me to hear or had set up somewhere and was waiting for me.

“Where exactly are you sending me?” I whispered to Panda, as I went down a hallway that branched right and then left quickly after.

“On a collision course with the red dots we saw, of course.”

No sooner had the words left his mouth than something lightning quick shot out from the wall and seized my left wrist in a pincer grip. Tough spines pushed against my skin, while pressure was applied to my arm. My eyes failed to take in the visage of my attacker for a moment, before I realized it was camouflaged in the same color-scheme and pattern as the walls themselves.

I lanced the shortsword directly into its center mass, but another quick limb intercepted my blade and pulled it from my grip, before seizing my right bicep. Brock clattered to the floor, while the enormous insect tried to literally tear my arms off.

Then its head began moving towards me. It was triangular and had two massive eyes at the top, with mandibles at the bottom, which eagerly chattered and moved in scissoring motions as it came near. I pulled my head back and smashed my forehead into the point between its eyes, producing a loud *crunch* and *splat* as the impact burst its exoskeleton apart.

As my attacker collapsed to the floor, I was pulled with it. I had to stomp with the heel of my shoes to break my left arm free, and then I pried open the folding claw locked onto my bicep.

“Fucking hell, that was a surprise.”

“I guess they’re not called Ambushers for nothing,” Panda commented.

I pulled out my Looking Glass and inspected the creature. It was like a centaur, except its body was that of a mantis, just the proportions were similar, as it had four legs and two arms, as well as an elongated back. It was about the same height as me, perhaps slightly taller.

| Level 5 | 'Ambusher Nymph' | Soldier ^x |
|---|------------------|----------------------|
| <p><i>“I’m not here, you can’t see me.”</i></p> <p>Job: <i>Ambusher Trainee</i> Affiliation: <i>Anti-Rebellion Force</i></p> <p><i>The Ambushers of the Anti-Rebellion Force are guerilla fighters who specialize in assassination, stealth, and, you guessed it, ambushing foes. They are often employed against Agencies who get too big and try to take over the System, or against key targets on Worlds about to take part in the GREAT GAME. But sometimes they are also sent after certain players who elude other Agencies.</i></p> <p><i>As with most of the entities that make up the multifaceted Agencies, they are capable of endless growth, with every molt increasing their size. This here is a Nymph who, as part of their training, is utilized as opposition against Players in the WEAPONLUTION EVENT.</i></p> | | |

This entity is dead.

“I was certain they were gonna be spiders,” I remarked, stooping to pick up Brock. I checked my arms for any serious wounds, but the Nymph had only inflicted some minor cuts and bruises.

“From the map, there should be two more nearby.”

“I’ll stay alert,” I said.

“Next time, stab ‘em with me, you nong!”

“I fucking tried!” I retorted.

“Your technique sucks, Nigel!”

“You know what, fuck you, Brock! I oughta leave you here!”

“...*You wouldn’t dare,*” Brock said in a small voice.

“Watch me,” I said and tossed him to the ground, before walking away.

“You come back here!!” yelled the shortsword.

“Is this really a good idea?” Panda wondered.

“I’ve had it with being talked back to like that!” I said, annoyed.

“I’m sorry!!” yelled Brock a second later. *“Oh god, please don’t leave me!! It’s so cold on this floor!! I miss the warmth of your hand!!”*

“Well, that was fast,” Panda said.

Then the walls on either side of me started moving. Or rather, the two creatures that had camouflaged themselves there began to move.

I hopped to the side, just in time to avoid a spine-covered scythe-limb aimed at my neck, but I couldn’t avoid the other one’s spine that dug into the flesh of my shoulder painfully, tearing the neat fabric of my suit jacket.

I sent my fist into the head of the one that’d grabbed me, pulverizing it in an instant, then moved out of the way of the other’s reach, before spinning on my heels and running back to fetch Brock from the floor.

“You returned for me!! I love yuu, you dumb fak!! Never leave me again, I’ll be good, I swear!!”

“It’s been ten seconds, Brock,” I said evenly.

“Ah, right... fak yuu!!”

I spun around again and flung the shortsword at the incoming predator, striking it in its right shoulder with the blade, where it dug in. The mantis nymph froze momentarily, before I leapt in with

a punch to its thin upper torso, which cracked its spine and made it slump to the ground. Then I tore free the blade and used it to cut off its head.

“*Fak yeah, cunt!! Wooh!! Blood!!*”

“It’s not blood,” I said.

“*So what if it’s vegetarian! Blood is blood!*”

“Your shoulder is bleeding pretty bad, Gambit,” Panda told me.

I looked down myself and saw that he was right. It definitely hurt, but, at this point, pain was a constant companion. “Guess I’ll try the sewing thing, now that I actually have both of my arms.”

After dropping to my ass on the cold stone floor, I pulled the Survival Kit that I’d looted from Michael John Michaels out of my inventory. It was like a plastic toolbox within which was the sewing kit, a half-eaten curry meatball sandwich, some Gatorade, and a notepad with some scribbles in it, no doubt from the previous owner.

The scribbles seemed to mostly just be reminders to himself, the following things were written down:

- ‘*Don’t feed the roaches*’
- ‘*Avoid public transit stations*’
- ‘*Johnathan is a murderer*’
- ‘*Chelsea and Jenna are both dead, you have to get by on your own now*’
- ‘*Don’t say the phrase: I need a Taxi*’

“*I need a Taxi?*” I wondered out loud, seeing how the phrase was underlined aggressively.

ERROR!

It is not possible to call a ‘Taxi’ to your current location.

Please try again later.

“Are you actually braindead, Gambit!?” Panda asked.

“You know I can’t read something like that and not act on it!”

“Next time let me do the reading then.”

“I wonder why Taxi is in quotation marks.”

“Isn’t it a type of Public Transportation?”

“Sort of, I guess?”

“Well, there’s your answer then.”

Gunshots sounded from down the end of the hallway I was in suddenly, before a man came into view, followed by two more people. They were all three running away from something, apparently not interested in killing each other at the moment.

I quickly put away the toolbox-like Kit and got to my feet. At the same time, a man in a yellow raincoat entered the hallway at the far end, holding a lever-activated gatling gun from his hands, which he immediately began spinning, releasing shot-after-shot. The first few whiffed, but then he quickly took down two of the three people.

Striding towards the incoming danger, I kept the first man between me and the distant shooter. I could tell he was about to yell at me to run, but I instead ran directly into him, blade-first. The shortsword pierced his heart and the way his body rested on the blade allowed me to hold him upright, as he quickly bled to death.

Holding the man like a literal human shield, I began quickly advancing on the gatling gunner, several of his bullets striking my cover, but lacking the penetrative power to reach me. The shield’s weapon was absorbed into my sword as I moved forward.

“Gambit, this is messed up, even for you.”

“It’s kill-or-be-killed Panda,” I said through gritted teeth. “Better I kill this guy than he shoots me in the back after I save him or becomes someone else’s kill.”

Shots *plinged* off the floor and walls and *splattered* against the body I held on my blade, as the distance to my quarry shortened.

Then, suddenly, the shooting stopped and I dared to look over the shoulder of my shield, seeing the gunner quickly reloading his belt magazine by pulling it in the reverse direction as it had been fed.

With a grunt, I tore my blade free and sprinted the distance between me and the guy, lunging at him with a diagonal slash at his throat.

The man only looked up in the last second as the tip of my sword sliced through his neck, severing windpipe and arteries in one go. Then he fell to the floor in a fountain of blood, while his weapon dissolved into blue particles that flowed into Brock.

“*Hell yeah!!*”

The first of the two evolutions popped up:

| Weaponlution — Level 5 | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Poisoned Edge | Frost Blade | Purple |

| | | |
|---|---|---------------|
| +Adds a toxin to your blade that slowly damages anyone cut by it | +Your weapon is now made of ice and inflicts frostbite | <u>Purple</u> |
|---|---|---------------|

“Awesome, level 5 must be special!” I said excitedly, looking at the options. I had no idea what the last one did, so I tapped the ‘Poisoned Edge’ option. Then the rightmost option lit up as if that was the one I’d clicked.

Suddenly I remembered my last achievement.

The shortsword in my hand became purple.

“Ah, motherf—”