

Chapter 8 - Just Desserts

By the time I got home it was almost two in the morning, but I was still wired from my success. Not only had my martial arts ring performed brilliantly, I finally had some resources to play around with! I had to fight the urge to go through the cards before I was even home. Instead I rode back as fast as I could, huffing and puffing when I finally reached my apartment. I couldn't help but muse that somehow straining myself physically felt better now that I knew it would help me utilize the skills from my ring. I carded my bike before rushing up the stairs, quiet as a mouse from the combat boots I was still wearing. I pushed into my apartment, releasing Ema from her card the second the door was closed.

"That is still extremely disorienting." Ema complained as she lifted off my hand and floated in front of me. "Did you make it back without any trouble?"

"Yeah, it was fine." I answered as I made my way through my tiny kitchen and back to my living room. "Cmon, I want to go through what we found."

I laid out all of the cards containing everything I had taken, slowly separating them out into two piles. One was what I planned on keeping for my own use, the other were things I planned on selling to pawn shops.

"Ema, do me a favor and go through the laptop, phones and the computer, see if there is anything other than the chop shop stuff on it." I asked, pushing out the two cell phones and the laptop. "If there isn't just reset them all to factory settings or whatever, wipe them all out."

"What do you plan on doing with them?" she asked, hovering over the cellphones first.

"I'm going to pull the computer and laptop apart." I explained as I finished separating the cards. "Then combine it all into my laptop and see if I can make a super laptop for you to use."

While she was working on the phones and laptop I pushed out my first big prize, the cashbox. I lifted it off of the table, feeling the heft and listening to the coins. I fiddled with the small lock on the front before tilting my head. I held the lock in my hand, positioning it just right so it wasn't making contact with the loop before pulling. I couldn't help but laugh as I carded the lock, but not the cashbox.

"That's handy." I said, showing Ema the card with the lock inside.

"It is. Those cards get more and more powerful every time you find a new use for them." She said, a bit flummoxed as I flicked the card back into the deck. "The first phone was clear, save a list of cars that the man in charge wanted as well as some details of the operation. Apparently he ran a car repair shop in the day and a chop shop at night."

"That sounds about right from what I know about how they work." I nodded as I flicked up the latch of the cash box. "Which is admittedly not very much. What about the second one?"

"That seems to be where we have hit another stroke of luck. It seems the owner of the phone had two shops he would bring cars to, depending on how close he was and what they were looking for. Though the exact location isn't said, several references put it in Harlem.

"Well I guess we know where we are taking the night shift next." I said with a smile. "Nice find Ema."

Ema bobbed and nodded, her parts shifting before she turned her attention to the laptop. With a soft hum it turned on, revealing it needed a password to log in.

"Ah, I was afraid of that." She said. "It appears that they have a password Carson, should I... wipe... it... anyway?"

Ema's question trailed off when she turned back to me. My eyes are locked to the now open cash box, my eyes and jaw hanging. Inside the box were several stacks of bills in various denominations. I pulled out a stack of tens and flicked through them.

"Well, it seems like some of our money problems are solved." Ema said happily before doing a scan of the box. "Four Hundred and thirty six dollars in cash, eighteen dollars in coins."

"Really?" I asked, looking at her and then back down at the box. "It looks like much more than that."

"The box has two layers and the bottom layer is empty."

"Ah, gotcha." I nodded and closed the box, pulling it back into the card. "Hey... do you think you could scan a safe and find out what the combination is?"

I ask before pushing the safe out of its card. It was a pretty large safe, reaching all the way up past my belly button by a few inches. It wasn't ancient, but it definitely had the look of something that was made before I was born.

"I can think of a few ways to get in with the Deck, but I don't want to ruin the safe, having a secure place to keep things is pretty handy."

"I can attempt it, yes. My scans won't penetrate the metal, but I could construct an image using sound and vibrations..." She admitted, floating over to the large metal box. "You should get some rest, with any luck I'll have the number when you wake up."

"Sounds... like a good idea" I agree through a yawn. "Thank you for your help Ema."

"It's why I'm here, Carson. Pleasant dreams."

I made my way to my bedroom, stripping down to my boxers and sliding into bed. Excited as I was, my exhaustion soon caught up with me and I was soundly asleep not long after I laid down. I slept like a log, only waking once the sun started shining through my bedroom window. I woke up with a smile, my mind already back to my successes the previous night as well as the potential goodies that the safe might contain. I quickly got dressed and headed into the living room. The safe was, obviously, where I had left it and Ema was hovering above my laptop. She turned to me as I entered and headed to the kitchen.

"Good morning Carson. How did you sleep?"

"Like a rock." I answered as I started my coffee machine. "I hardly even remember my head hitting the pillow."

"That is good. I thought you would sleep longer considering how late you were up..."

"No, I've got stuff to do today. I want to bring one of the phones, the tv and the car models to the pawnshop." I explained with a shake of my head. "I also want to see about expanding my repertoire."

As the coffee machine was going I quickly made myself some eggs and toast for breakfast, bringing it to the living room when everything was done. I almost dropped them both when I bumped into the safe I had left in the small room.

"Fuck, I forgot that was there!" I cursed, putting my eggs and mug on top of the metal box. "I'm gonna have to figure out where to put this if I'm gonna keep it."

"Indeed. Good news though, I was able to form an internal framework of the safe." Ema stated as she floated over to me. "The combination is eighteen, then twenty four, then six."

I rub my hand together with a big smile, walking around to the front of the safe. I spin the dial, entering the code before giving the lever a spin and.... It didn't open.

"You went the wrong direction." Ema corrected, her amusement clearly audible.

With a shake of my head I re-entered the combination and spun the handle, the safe unlocking with a series of clunks. I slide the door open to find it full. Most of it was paperwork, a few stacks of insurance, tax and other records. I resisted the urge to shove all of that into a card and tear it. Instead I put on my gloves, ruffled it all together and put it on a nearby shelf. If there was anything groundbreaking on it I could turn it in to the police as evidence, and if I did that I didn't want my fingerprints on them.

Under the paperwork was the real prize, a pile of twenty dollar bills, all rolled into different rolls, as well as a stack of other bills. I pulled them out, eyes wide and looked to Ema, who scanned it without me even having to ask.

"Two thousand four hundred and eighty dollars in twenties. That is quite the prize."

"Yeah... that's a lot of cash..."

"There are a few more things inside, on the bottom shelf."

I nod, putting the cash on the coffee table and bending down to look at the lower section of the safe. On it were two boxes of shotgun slugs, another sheaf of paper. I carded the slugs and started going through the paper.

"Ah, its requests and parts lists from certain vehicles. Pretty straight... forward..." I stated, trailing off as I kept reading. "Interesting. Looks like we might have two leads, Ema."

"What did you find?" she asked, floating to my shoulder.

"It's a list of vehicles someone else was interested in, that they wanted whole. Some more expensive stuff here as well. It's also got an address to deliver them too. It's further in state though..."

"What do you think?"

"I think that it sounds like we have no idea what is going to be there, and that we should consider it but not rush into it."

"Right, I agree." I said, putting the information into a card and standing straight. "For now though...I need to go spend some of this money."

"What do you plan on spending it on?" Ema asked.

"An offensive option." I answered, grabbing and carding almost half the cash. "I was thinking about a bow."

"Do you know how to use a bow?"

"Not the foggiest. But I can make a ring that will teach me." I responded with a smirk. "Plus with the cards the possibilities for arrow payloads are pretty much endless. The most difficult part is going to be finding trigger mechanisms. I'll make a super gun at some point but a bow will give me serious flexibility."

"Ah, that's a fair point. Are you going out today?"

"As soon as I finish breakfast and shower"

About an hour later I was riding my bike to the closest pawn shop I could find online. When I got close I performed the usual alleyway switch, this time bringing out the tv I was getting rid of. It was a bit difficult but I managed to get it into the shop. It took a bit of haggling but eventually I sold the phone, tv and the models for three hundred dollars as well as fifty dollars off of two compound bows. I also bought every arrow he had that was sized for my new bows, almost two hundred. Between all of that, four quivers and a simple gold ring I ended up spending just a bit over eight hundred dollars.

The next three hours were spent riding my bike around the city visiting various stores. A well stocked hobby shop, a home goods store, a bookstore, and a few different hardware stores. In one morning I spent almost two thousand dollars, a serious hit to my recently acquired funds.

"Well, that was a lot of money I just spent." I called out to Ema when I got back to the apartment. "But I think I have all I need to make some serious additions to my arsenal."

"Welcome back." She called out, voice coming from the living room. "And I'm glad you found what you needed."

I head into the living room, kicking off my shoes as I go. After a few minutes of set up I had a pile of arrows next to me, my quivers on the table and a dozen bags in arms reach.

"Okay, first things first. Instant Legolas ring." I mumbled to myself as I worked.

I quickly combined several archery books together, including two about trick shots and another about Robin Hood. I combined the result with my simple gold ring, making a C rank card.

"This one is much easier." I assured Ema after I slid the ring on. "It must have been because we jammed too much info into the last one."

"That's good to know for the future I suppose." she responded, floating around me as I worked. "Oh! You'll be happy to know that there were several clean arrests last night."

"That's good! Got what I needed and uncovered a chop shop, not bad!"

I chuckled as I carded each of the quivers and combined each of them with some left over sound baffling foam. I then combined them all together before going to my closet and pulling out an old backpack, adding to the new quiver as well. The result was a large quiver that was almost as wide as my back. Putting the C rank card to the side I pulled out four books on organization and combined them into one, combining it with a large magnet I bought from a hardware store. With a pause I combined it with the backpack.

"Still C rank..." I mumbled, flipping the card in my fingers.

I slid ten arrows into the quiver and they all moved around, organizing by what color the shaft of each arrow was. I pulled them out and this time found ten arrows that were as similar as I could find. Sliding them into the pack I watched as they all grouped together off to the side.

"Okay, that's cool..."

"But?" Ema asked, sensing I wasn't satisfied.

"I was hoping for a higher rank." I admitted, putting the quiver on my back.

It slid on easily and felt like a great fit. I reached behind me and had to grab for a full five seconds before I found all the grouped arrows.

"I'll have no idea which arrow I'll be grabbing. I was kind of hoping for it to auto organize like it does but also feed me the arrow I want."

"Hmmm... well you haven't added a concept that would allow that. Organization worked like it was supposed to but being able to recognize what arrow you ask for requires some intelligence. Or atleast the ability to listen and react."

"Huh, that makes a lot of sense" I agreed with a nod, before thinking about how I would do that. "Oh! The laptop!"

"That might work, should I wipe it first?"

I nodded and pulled the arrows from the pack and pulled it into a card as Ema floated over to the older laptop. It didn't take long for her to wipe it clean. I quickly carded it when she gave me a nod before combining them.

"Aha! B rank!" I quickly pulled the quiver out, giving it a look. "Wow, that's sleek."

The large quiver had new metal accents that lined around the edges, as well as a new square of leather that was latched over, covering most of the quiver's top. I lifted the latched cover and fed in twenty arrows, watching them organize into colors. I latched the new piece of leather over and slid it over my shoulder. I reach back, thinking about an arrow with a red tip and instead pull out a random arrow.

"Huh? What-"

"Try saying it out loud." Ema said, interrupting my complaint. "You didn't give it mind reading abilities after all."

"Oh. Makes sense." I admitted sheepishly. "Red fletching."

I called out before reaching back. I could hear the shifting and moving arrows as I reached back and pulled the arrow out by the nock. Low and behold an arrow with red fletching was in my hand.

"Nice call Ema, worked like a charm!" I praised excitedly, pulling the quiver back into a card and sitting back down. "Alright! Let's make some crazy trick arrows."

Over the next four hours I puzzled my way through over a hundred and fifty trick arrows, using four combined sensors I bought in bulk from the hobby store to create a sensor that activates on impact. Explosive arrows from nitro shots, lighters and the biggest fireworks that were legal in New York. Ice arrows that are each a combination of ice, water, dry ice and liquid nitrogen from wart treatment kits. Shock arrows made from dozens of batteries and capacitors charged from the wall socket. I made three different strengths of capture arrows, each filled with nets, ropes or chains. I also made two special arrows, each holding a box of shotgun shells. I even managed to make what I think was a blunt impact and armor piercing arrows out of foam and needles respectively, though I had no idea how effective they would be. Eventually I leaned back, feeding my quiver a selection of each type before carding it.

"Well, how does it look?" I asked Ema, latching the quiver on.

"It looks good." She answered, circling me slowly. "The question is how is it going to interact with your stealth suit."

"Shouldn't be too bad. And if it is, I can keep it in a card until I need it."

I explained as I started to clean up the mess of plastic bags, containers and boxes, ultimately carding it and tearing the card in two.

"Well that's done. I think I'm gonna head down early to Harlem."

"Why so early?" Ema asked, floating around.

"There is a pizza place my dad used to take me around there. I want to see if it's still there in this reality."

"I see... do you want me to stay here?"

"You can if you want." I answered, standing as I stretched my back. "But I'm probably gonna stay around there on a camp out. I can card you if you want"

She answered by floating closer and waiting for me to hold out my hand. She landed in my palm with a soft pulse of green.

"Like I would let you do that on your own." She said with a scoff. "See you in a while"

I pulled her into a card, smiling as I got ready to go. It had been a while since I had been to Harlem.