

Chapter -66

When I returned to the gauntlet of furniture walls that Bee had set up, I found her and Samantha small-talking while they scanned the two hallways that led to the bathroom on the corner of the third floor. Apparently, I’d killed almost all the enemies that’d been attracted to the Sphere, leaving just the ones without blood for them, like the skeletons and some odd cog-wheel creatures, which might’ve come from the watchmaker on the second floor.

The bodies of these lay next to the large corpse of the Shark Merman.

“You’re back!” Bee exclaimed in relief.

“And no longer wearing your weird fetish shorts.”

“Does either of you know if the Safe Zone has a shower facility in it?” I asked.

“Hopefully,” answered Samantha, “I haven’t showered in over a week and I’m not dumb enough to try my luck with any of the ponds in the various parks.”

“Is that gel in your hair?” Bee asked upon seeing my stiff slicked-back hairstyle.

“It’s blood,” Panda answered.

“And other *stuff*,” I added.

“Your balloon glove looks different,” Samantha noted.

“It levelled up.”

“Levelled up?” she asked. “It can do that.”

“Yours can’t?”

“...No.”

“*That’s ‘cause Brock’s one of a kind!!*”

“How’s the Sphere?” I asked, changing the subject away from my unusual weapon.

“Come, I’ll show you,” Samantha said.

“I’ll stay behind and keep watch!” Bee announced.

Panda, who’d gotten back on my shoulder after I put the Carapace Suit on, dismounted and made his way over to the Beetle Girl to keep her company.

Samantha led me through the furniture corridors to the bathrooms. The walls outside were white and plain, and a round sign with a stylized person in a skirt was attached to the door. She walked through and held it open for me.

When I entered the female bathroom, a potent blue light assailed me, as though a powerful lamp was hidden in one of the open stalls. Which it was...

“Why did you put it on top of the toilet?” I asked her. Before she could answer, I noticed a guy on the floor whose head was half-crushed by a powerful blow. “Did *you* kill that guy?”

“He jumped out of the stall as soon as I came in here! What was I supposed to do??”

“Probably thought you were a monster...”

“It was pure reflex!” she argued.

I pulled out my looking glass and took in the dead guy. There was very little info about him, other than the fact that his name was John Clyde and that he was a level 1 Rogue.

“Guy was probably scared and had been hiding in here for a while,” I guessed, noticing the stash of foodstuff that took up space in one of the other stalls. “With free access to water, this isn’t a bad place to hide out, and the monsters roaming the mall do keep scavengers at bay.”

“I’m sorry, okay! Is that what you want to hear!?”

I ignored her and walked over to the glowing Safe Zone Sphere that hovered above the bowl of a pristine porcelain toilet.

“*Inspect*,” I said and a new type of menu appeared:

SAFE ZONE SPHERE
<i>An object capable of transforming almost any place into a Safe Zone. The duration of the Creation Event is based on the area chosen to be transformed. During the Event, Enemies and Bosses within and near the area will be attracted to the Sphere, seeking to destroy it.</i>
Status: ACTIVE
Type: CAMP
Selected Area: ‘Serenity Park Mall’
Time Remaining: 18 minutes 51 seconds
Owner: ‘Samantha’
<i>You are not the Owner of this Safe Zone Sphere.</i>

The following options are available to you:

Destroy – 15 second timer

Claim – 30 second timer

“I have the option of Destroying or Claiming the Sphere,” I remarked.

“Good to know,” she replied. “I thought it might have a capture feature or something like that.”

“Something’s coming!” Bee suddenly shouted, her voice muffled by the walls of the bathroom. It was almost like they’d soundproofed it, which explained why we hadn’t noticed Samantha being surprised by the guy and subsequently killing him.

Samantha and I ran out through the door and up onto the viewing platforms next to Bee. There was nothing immediately visible, but a repeated tremor rolled across the floor, clearly the footfalls of some giant creature.

As we prepared for the ‘last boss’ of this defense mission, the sounds of scrambling shoes on slippery tiles came from the floor below, accompanied by yelling that was immediately deafened by a tremendously-loud warbling roar.

“Players are coming this way,” Samantha remarked.

Sure enough, a group of about eight people hurried up the escalator that I’d littered with bodies, coming out onto the third floor with deer-in-the-headlights looks about them. They quickly noticed our fortification and ran towards us, yelling for help.

“Bleh...” I spat.

“What?” Samantha asked, looking away from the incoming Players and gauging my expression.

“We know them,” Bee answered. “Last time we saw them, they were trying to kill us, so we killed a lot of them in return.”

It was Hawaiian Shirt Guy and seven hangers-on. Annabella last-name-definitely-starts-with-an-E wasn’t anywhere to be seen however.

“Apart from Steve, the rest of them are no higher than level 3,” Bee said. “Steve is level 9.”

“You have to run!” Hawaiian Shirt Guy yelled. He and his group quickly climbed up over the mess of bodies and onto the precarious furniture walls.

“Happy Birthday,” said Samantha, as the guy made it to us, then wrinkled her face in confusion.

His friends were slower than him, and it seemed clear that he’d put most of his points into Dexterity, so he could run faster...

He sighed. “You’ve really got to run,” he told her. “This big monster came out of the ponds in the park and... and...”

Steve finally noticed Bee and I next to Samantha. He made a small “Eep!”, before slowly climbing backwards and away from us.

“Stay. They won’t hurt you,” Samantha said. “Also, we can’t leave, we’re almost done creating a Safe Zone here.”

He blinked several times, his terrified and wide eyes scanning the three of us.

“Where’s Annabella,” I asked.

“The Swan ate her!” yelled one of the horrified women in Steve’s retinue.

“Why did you attack the monster in the park?” I asked.

“We didn’t—” Steve began to say, but then another woman cut him off.

“He and Anna said it would be a good way for us to level!”

Another one joined in, “They said the two of them could handle it!”

“Before she died, Annabel said it was level 25!” exclaimed a third.

I glanced at the people Steve had brought with him, then frowned.

“He’s only surrounded himself with women way below his level,” Panda remarked before I could put it into words myself.

“Get in here, quick,” Samantha told the seven women.

“Don’t!” yelled Steve. “That man is a monster!”

“Fuck you, Steve!” I yelled back at him, trying, and failing, to flip him off with my right hand.

He seemed about to turn around and take his chance somewhere else, but then a devastating shudder rocked the entire floor under us.

“Woah, what was—” was the only thing Samantha managed to blurt out before the floor thirty-five yards down the hallway exploded up into the ceiling, bringing with it a Swan the size of a U-Haul.

Level 25	‘Serenity Park Swan’	World Boss ^x
<i>“*IRATE HONKING*”</i>		
<i>Everyone knows geese are assholes. But have you ever wondered who geese themselves consider assholes? That’s right, it’s swans. They’re territorial and mean, even when they aren’t protecting their young, and will bully geese who are themselves notorious bullies.</i>		

This swan believes the entirety of Serenity Park belongs to him, and he will chase away all those who touch its grassy lawns or murky ponds.

Fun fact!

If two World Boss Swans meet, they will fight to the death and the winner will evolve into a Hydra-Swan. We highly encourage you to make this happen!