

Chapter -36

“You look ridiculous in those boots,” Panda mocked. He was riding atop of Bee’s shoulder, while I bounced towards a large structure that seemed to grow off to the side of the amphitheater. It was made of some off-white silk.

“Don’t listen to ‘im, Nigel!! You’re a fair dinkum specimen, not lying!”

“Thanks, Brock.”

“Why is it your weapon also talks?” Bee asked.

“Fuck if I know,” I replied.

She sighed longingly. “I want my own talking weapon.”

“Maybe you’ll get one if you go into the Event area?” Panda guessed. “That’s when Gambit got his.”

“You know, I don’t even think we can get back there,” I said.

“It’s true that it’s quite a ways away from this place, but maybe you and Brock can just punch down the walls and tunnel a way there.”

“Let’s see if crashing the Production Control Room doesn’t end the Event first,” I said. It wasn’t that I didn’t mind the idea of going back in and killing enough people to escape, but the thought of having to put Bee through that too made me feel something weird. It took me a moment to realize it was: concern. She wasn’t my kid to watch out for, nor even remotely related to me, but I still felt a need to protect her somehow. And I was responsible for her turning into a monster, after all. Or well, half-monster.

“Didn’t they say the Broadcast Department is staffed by Spiders?” I asked, as we came up to the front of the strange structure.

It was, as mentioned, made of off-white silk, which, upon closer inspection was definitely spiderweb. The main part of the structure was an enormous cocoon that grew around and under the seating area for the amphitheater, which was, I now realized, actually slightly lifted off the cavern floor below. It wasn’t noticeable unless you stood near its edge.

The structure had a small tunnel connecting the side of the open theater to a series of round buildings stack together, before they culminated in the large cocoon. I put my right foot on the threshold of the tunnel, touching its sole against the silky floor. To my surprise, it wasn’t sticky at all.

“What kind of spiders do you think they are?” Bee wondered.

“And more to the point, do you think there are any inside?” Panda asked.

“...Hold up, you’re afraid of spiders?” I asked him.

“Don’t act like you are unphased by them!” he replied defensively.

“It would be strange if it was empty,” Bee commented.

I let out a deep breath and rolled my shoulders. “Guess it’s a good opportunity to get some kills for my next level.”

“Me too!” Bee said excitedly.

“How close are you?” I asked.

“I’m not sure, can I see it somewhere?”

“You say *Level Progress* to make it show up,” I told her, the command triggering it for me as well.

You are currently Level -9	
Unspent Attribute Points: 0	
Points already invested: 9	
<i>Kills required for Level -10</i>	<i>3/25</i>

“I need 12 more kills for level 4,” she said.

“I’m 22 away from level -10,” I replied.

“Would be exciting if 10 actually gives you the ability to evolve,” she said.

“Let’s hope so.”

I squeezed the handle on Brock, then said, “Let’s go.”

Bee followed behind me as I went down the strange web tunnel, which she unhelpfully explained was similar to the entrance of a Funnel Web Spider’s nest. It wasn’t a very reassuring thought to imagine that a huge monster was waiting at the end for us, having felt our approach through tripwire strands...

The tunnel coiled around on itself before leading under the platform upon which the amphitheater stood and ending in a small spherical room. Similar to Riii’s Commentary Booth, screens and monitors hung from the walls and ceiling. However, there was also a crescent-shaped desk, almost like a receptionist’s, behind which sat a strange creature.

“Ehh... hi? Can I help you?” asked the creature, while one of its four arms rapidly clicked a red button next to the laptop they were sitting behind.

I was fairly sure it was a woman, though the eight reflective-black eyes at the top of her bald head made it a bit hard to tell. From her long torso sprouted four normal arms and as I raised up onto my toes, I saw that her lower body was supported on four legs, with a large abdomen sprouting where her butt should’ve been, similar to the Ants from the CPS. Instead of clothes, her body was covered in a thick carpet of brownish-grey fur.

Quick as a Wild Western cowboy protagonist, I pulled out my Looking Glass and scanned her:

Level 5	'T-t-t-kha'	Receptionist ^x
<p>“*Chittering noises*”</p> <p>Job: Receptionist Affiliation: Broadcast Department</p> <p><i>This is a Receptionist working for the Broadcast Department. Her job, like that of all receptionists in industries with literally-zero customer interaction is one veiled in mystery and intrigue.</i></p> <p><i>The Broadcast Department is primarily staffed by Spiders like her, but they often hire other species to deal with any shows they’re hosting, since they are, by nature, reclusive and uncharismatic. This should also make you wonder why she is working as a receptionist... Our guess is nepotism.</i></p> <p><i>She is at the very bottom of the totem pole in terms of power and influence within her Agency. Even the janitors, who clean and maintain the webs of their structures, are paid higher.</i></p> <p><i>She seems terrified of you.</i></p>		

“Beetle Bolt!” Bee exclaimed and a loud buzzing came from her outstretched palm, before a baseball-sized hole appeared in the center of T-t-t-kha’s many-eyed head.

“Ah, what the fuck, Bee!” Panda yelled in outrage, still riding on her shoulder.

“She was calling reinforcements!” she yelled.

“Rule one of taking down a corporation is that you spare the service clerks, janitors, and receptionists!”

“I got an achievement for that,” she commented, ignoring him. “It’s called ‘*Not the Receptionist!*’. Apparently, her rich and influential uncle has put a bounty on my head now.”

“Goddamn it!” Panda complained. “How is it that both of you are such total reckless morons!”

“Fuck it!” I said, feeling tremors in the silken floor as more creatures like her seemed to head for our location. “We’re not leaving anyone alive!”

I ran forward, hefting Brock in my right hand, while Bee covered me with her arm raised palm-out, as though her limb was a rifle. Which, in a way, I guess it was...

As we moved from the reception and into the next room, I spotted something on one of the many screens that filled the interior: it was a woman with her dirty-blond hair in a perm, who was wielding an honest-to-God Bazooka, and who, according to a little name tag, was called ‘Samantha’. She seemed really mad, while she chased down a group of two Players, letting off massive explosive shots every few seconds.

Then three spiders broke into the room from a hole in the ceiling, as opposed to the opening at the other end from where we’d entered. All three were covered in SWAT attire over their furry bodies, which looked preposterous.

Immediately, one dropped to the floor with a hole through its head, Bee’s buzzing Beetle Bolt blowing through the protective glass of his helmet and destroying his skull. I loped forward, my Moon Boots making it feel like I was in a bouncy castle, before smacking Brock into the side of one of the two closely-stacked spiders.

BONK!

The force of the impact smashed them into one another, before sending them across the room where they splattered against the flexible wall and crushed some monitors with their bodies.

“*Wheeeew!! That was sick as!!*” yelled Brock excitedly.

“Woah!” Bee said. “That was amazing!”

“You’re not so bad yourself,” I replied. “Nice shooting.”

“More incoming from above!” Panda yelled.

Moments later two more SWAT spiders came down through the hole, then two more, and two more, and so forth, until twelve were upon us within mere seconds. Several of them skittered across the ceiling, upside-down, while the rest dropped straight down to the floor.

It struck me as odd that none of them had weapons, but then I noticed that their fingers were dotted with sharp nails and guessed that they might possess some kind of venom.

“Don’t let them touch you!” I told Bee, as we backed up to the reception, trying to bottleneck the security team.

The Beetle Girl continued to land shot-after-shot to the heads of the spiders, while I smashed Brock into any that came through the doorway. Every hit of the impactful balloon hammer sent ripples through the building, but due to the flexible nature of its silken web, each impact just made the walls, floor, and ceiling stretch, before it returned to its previous shape.

Within just a minute, the room beyond the reception was littered with broken bodies. The security team had been confusingly-weak.

“Phew,” I said, sitting down on the desk that the Receptionist’s body still lay behind.

“I levelled up,” Bee said, before following it up with, “Status.”

“What did you invest your points in?”

“*I wished you could have a look,*” she said and suddenly her Status screen appeared in front of my eyes.

Level 4	'Bee'	<i>Beetle Girl</i> ^x	
STATS			
Health: 6	Stamina: 9	Armor: 6	
Carry Weight: 60	Top Speed: 13,5 km/h	Mana: 18	
ATTRIBUTES			
Strength: 3	Dexterity: 4	Intelligence: 9	Vitality: 3
Athleticism: 3	Perception: 3	Wisdom: 7	Defense: 3
ABILITIES		PASSIVES	
'Beetle Breeze' 'Beetle Bolt' 'Beetle Barrier'		'Wayward Minor' 'Inanimate Voices' 'Insanity' 'Beetle Brawn'	

“...Is that *all* it takes to show someone your screens!?” Panda exclaimed, seemingly offended by the banality of the verbal command.

“Wait, this is actually legible...” I muttered in confusion.

I pulled up my own Status and repeated the command. As she looked at my info, she made some strange noises.

“It says your Athleticism is that of a ‘bat’ and that your Stamina is ‘okay, I guess’. How weird.”

“You understand what those sticks say!?” I exclaimed.

“当たり前だよ,” she replied with a deep Yakuza-like voice.

More commotion from above stopped me from asking follow-up questions, and quickly it felt like the entire spiderweb structure was in motion, as though every creature within was making a break for the exit. An exit that lay behind us...