

Chapter -98

Congratulations! You have unlocked an achievement! ^x
<i>‘Sheep’s Clothes’</i> Used a disguise to fit in with a Cult.
<i>You might be thinking, ‘Oh wow, what a highly-specific achievement for my very unique scenario!’</i>
<i>Wrong!</i>
<i>There are countless Cult-related Dungeons and encounters that offer up Cultist Robes to allow you to fit in and avoid detection. You’re not a genius, we designed you to take this path. That’s right, you’re just a child playing within our sandbox!</i>
<i>But, fortunately for you, good children get good rewards.</i>
Reward: 20x ‘Game Coins’

“The person writing these messages is not very nice,” commented Bee, in response to getting the same achievement.

The crimson robes I was wearing were like XXL, and with how the hood draped over Lordie who sat atop my hair, it looked like I had a freakishly-shaped head. I lifted my arms, the overlong sleeves spilling over my hands.

“There’s no way we’re fooling anyone,” I replied.

“It’s working so far,” Panda remarked.

We’d made it half-way up the gravel path to the Mansion’s front door. The building was just as I recalled. A gaudy white-painted three-story home with way too many windows and balconies, which was how I’d made it inside during my last visit. It was the most basic image of wealth imaginable, and yet the other houses we’d seen on the way here had been no different.

Around us, in the manicured garden, were what I could only describe as a Cultist Tea Party, with figures in robes like ours sitting around white metal tables sipping on fancy cups and eating biscuits.

“*Meow..*” said Lordie.

“Couldn’t have said it better myself,” I replied.

“What did he say?” Panda asked.

“Look,” Bee interjected before I could translate, pointing to two suspicious figures who huddled close within the shadow cast by a balcony on the second floor. Not far from them were a few gardeners, also in robes, using silver hedge-clippers and swords to sculpt trees and bushes into smooth and pleasant-to-look-at shapes.

“Those must be the two Players the Sneak-Peek mentioned,” I said.

“How can you tell?” Panda asked.

“Because they’re acting weird,” Bee answered.

“And their robes also don’t fit,” I added.

“Bee’s fits her perfectly,” Panda countered.

“That’s only because of my wings,” she said.

The two figures were suddenly looking in our direction.

Bee waved at them.

“What are you doing!?” I hissed at her.

“Maybe they’re friendly like Chris?”

“We’re not here to make friends,” I told her.

“Aw, look, they’re leaving,” she complained.

The pair moved around the building to avoid us, and I had the sense that they didn’t care much about actually clearing this Dungeon. Based on the average level the Sneak-Peek had mentioned, they probably didn’t have a chance of clearing the boss encounter. So, instead of fighting, they were seemingly just hiding here, waiting for *someone else* to clear the place out.

Or, more concerningly, they might intentionally be living here for protection, since the Cultists didn’t bother them. The fact that they were avoiding us made this possibility seem just as likely as the first.

With Bee and I here, they wouldn’t have to wait long, if their aim was to be set free, but, to complicate matters, other Players were arriving into the Dungeon behind us.

The Winged-Raincoat Guy; an honest-to-God Knight in full metal plate with a greatsword; a woman in a basketball jersey holding a bowling ball and pin; and a teenage boy in white robes, with a wooden staff that screamed ‘healer’, stepped onto the gravel.

I spun around to face them, but Bee put a hand on my shoulder. “Let’s not fight them yet.”

“Why not?” I asked. “They haven’t noticed us yet. It’s the perfect time to strike.”

“Let the Cultists soften them up first,” Panda said.

Bee nodded. “None of them are wearing robes, and, look, the Cultists have noticed them already.”

Without a single word between them, which was honestly super creepy, the full host of Cult Members lounging in the garden, as well as several from inside the Mansion, started walking towards the newcomers.

Matthew Twine immediately engaged his fluffy wings and took to the air, acting both as the vanguard and scout of his group. He started flying towards us and I prepared myself, clenching my right fist that, despite the balloon gauntlet, was also covered by the long sleeve of my robes.

“I’m fakkin ready!” squealed Brock.

As soon as he was airborne, the Cultists changed behavior. They surged forward as one, their arms limp behind them, while their legs strode down the soft grass-covered hill. Even more of them came from within the big house and there were over forty of them now.

“Keep an eye on Angel Boy,” I told Panda, while turning back towards the Mansion and hurrying up the path, with Bee right behind me. Although she was the one that’d urged me to feed them to the Cultists, I could tell that she really wanted to go airborne and take on Matthew Twine, since he’d been able to escape last time.

As we ran up the gravel path, I felt certain that we’d be spotted easily, since our movements went against the flow of the Cult Members that kept pouring out from the building, carrying weapons of dozens of varieties, with the only commonality being that they were all silver. However, it seemed the mass movement concealed us.

By the time we got to the front door, which was wide open and continued to spew out red-robed figures, the garden path had more than sixty Cultists arrayed around the four intruders, although they couldn’t reach the guy who flew above them.

Weapons were clashing loudly, disturbing the idyllic culty calm, with many robed corpses already spread about the lawns. But the ones coming out of the Mansion seemed to have no end to them, and the Players hunting me were not killing them fast enough. They were going to be overrun within the next two minutes.

“What a shot!” Panda suddenly exclaimed and I looked up, just in time to catch Winged-Raincoat Guy falling out of the air on a spiraling trajectory, a silver javelin stuck through his left wing.

I wanted to go for him, but as soon as he touched down on the grass, near an abandoned white-painted metal table, ten Cultists jumped him immediately, totally obscuring him from sight.

Bee frowned, but then pulled me through the door, as yet more crimson robes moved past us.

“Why did you not want to fight them?” I asked her.

“Because last time we went in without a plan, both of us nearly died.”

“I didn’t almost die,” I replied.

“You used your invulnerability thing from your Cloak,” Panda reminded me unhelpfully.

“So? It all worked out in the end.”

“If Matthew Twine had been stronger when he tackled you on the roof, you would’ve been dead,” Bee said.

“I would’ve lived, I’ve got a Cheat Death ability now.”

“I think you’re missing her point, Gambit,” Panda remarked.

“With other Players growing stronger, attacking them without a plan becomes significantly more dangerous,” she argued.

“So what? We just sit here and wait for them to almost die before we fight them? That’s lame.”

“No, we find out where the Mayor is, like you wanted, while they keep all the enemies busy.”

“Oh, that’s... that’s not a bad idea actually.”

Panda opened his mouth to make a comment, but then thought better of it.

“Just say it,” I told him.

“No, I’ll save it. If I praise you too often, you might get full of yourself.”

“He already is,” Bee muttered.

“I can hear you, y’know...”

“*Me-ow.*”

“Et tu, Lordie!?”

As the fighting outside occupied the Cultists and Players both, we went through the three floors, looking for signs of the Mayor. The house interior was completely different from when he had actually lived here. It had very strong culty vibes now, thanks to many silver decorations, scores of red candles all over, and wine glasses filled with blood.

“I suppose you must be pleased,” Panda noted. “All your suspicions about the Mayor are proven true.”

“This has nothing to do with Skinstealers,” I replied, while in the middle of pulling on every book lined on the shelves of a bookcase in a second-floor study. However, none of them were clever switches revealing a hidden room.

While there were plenty of signs of occult activity, none of it was specific to the Mayor and thus utterly useless.

“Do you think Logan came in here?” I asked.

“I don’t think so,” Bee replied. “The view we saw broadcasted of him in the chamber below the Mall was just him going past the park in this area.”

“It’s possible that the Announcer lied to you about him actually gunning for the Mayor,” Panda added.

I didn’t like how much sense that made, since, after all, Logan didn’t seem to have had any specific goal, as he moved through Castleburg. Particularly since he had immediately hid inside a Dungeon, when I put out the Manhunt Quest.

“I’ll find a way to deal with her during the next event,” I promised.

“What do you think *this* is?” Bee asked, lifting up a piece of silver that looked like the bottom-half of a mask. It had apparently just been lying on top of a large mahogany desk placed in front of a window overlooking the garden.

Outside, the four Players were fighting for their lives, while making our search for clues a total breeze.

I narrowed my eyes at piece of silver.

“*Inspect.*”

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

“Ahah! A clue!” I exclaimed.

“I wonder if the other piece is as easy to find,” Panda mused.

“Do you think it opens a secret door?” Bee asked.

“Of course it does! This isn’t a proper Cult if they don’t have secret doors and hidden basement chambers for ritualistic sacrifices.”

“Let’s check the third floor,” she said, the excitement of searching for clues overcoming her as well.