

Chapter -79

Bee took her eyes off the cube for a moment, as we stood on the edge of the elevator shaft, looking down into the darkness below. The only other time she’d looked away from it was to help me install the new plugin, much to Panda’s consternation.

By now, all other Players in the Mall seemed to have left, although perhaps a few had gone into hiding in the surviving stores or the IKEA Dungeon, which was sure to be like trading plague for cholera.

Without a 3-2-1 or anything, the Moth Magician just stepped off the edge and let herself fall for several feet before engaging her wings to slow her descent. I followed after her and used my own gliding wings, while bringing up the inspection of the Lord’s Hand.

‘Lord’s Hand’	x
<i>Familiar</i>	
<i>Hah! Bet you thought this was a Boss reward that would give you awesome new skills!</i>	
<i>Instead, it’s the burden of caring for a living creature!</i>	
<i>Gotcha!</i>	
<i>This is a friendly hand-spider that only responds to the name ‘Lordie’.</i>	
<i>This familiar cannot be unsummoned and will stick with you forever. If it dies while in its current state, you will die alongside it.</i>	
<i>Additionally, it needs to be fed three times a day and is a very picky eater.</i>	

After a set amount of time, it will mature and become a useful companion.

This familiar appears on your Appraisal!

No sooner had I read through the information than a seven-fingered brown-grey hand with papery skin full of stitches popped into existence atop my head.

“**Meow**,” it said, with a sultry deep voice, sounding like Morgan Freeman.

“What was *that*?” Bee yelled from below.

“Uh... nothing,” I told her.

Then an achievement followed:

Congratulations! You have unlocked an achievement! ^x

‘Adoption!’

Found a Familiar.

Familiars are a rare type of non-Player companion, and you can’t have more than one. Not all of them are as difficult to obtain as this one, but the requirements are always quite complex, though it’s for a good reason. Because, if you survive long enough to see them mature, you will have a significant edge over your competition.

But that’s a big IF. Your life is now linked to your familiar’s, so you must keep it alive or die alongside it. However, it won’t die if you do and can be claimed by other Players from your corpse.

And do try to keep it from starving. Part of the ‘fun’ of having a familiar is trying to figure out what it eats. By fun, we of course mean from our perspective. I’m sure it’ll be quite stressful for you.

Reward: The inability to ever go on a vacation again without worrying about who will take care of your pet while you’re gone

“Ah shit,” I muttered.

“Congratulations, you’re a dad...” Panda mocked.

The fact that my life was now linked to the hand-spider atop my head was not great. Having to find food for it was also a kind of problem I didn’t want to deal with.

“Do you think I can give this to someone else?”

“Doubt they’d let you,” the plushie replied.

I knew he was probably right, but I wanted to ask the Safe Zone Merchants, just to be sure.

“*Meow*,” said Lordie, the tone implying he was on to me.

Bee floated down past the edge of the elevator shaft and immediately let out a gasp. I followed her down and saw what she’d reacted to: a wall of fire blanketed most of the cavern, where the cocoon structure was still ablaze, as though the web material was not only highly-flammable, but also long-burning. And yet, despite the conflagration, the chamber at the back that Liam had used for the screens was intact. Almost as if it was kept safe by some kind of forcefield. I wondered if there was another Psychic Snail around and whether it kept the monitors safe.

We settled down where I’d killed Isabella, although her body was gone, with just a chunky bloodstain and a wisp left behind. While Bee went over to loot it, I reequipped my Carapace Suit and Swan Cloak.

“There’s a full set of riot gear in here, a sword, and a firework tube like a Roman Candle. There’s also six-hundred-and-twenty Coins.”

The appraisal hadn’t been lying when it said Liam gave all his Coins to Isabella.

“You should take the gear, I’ll take the coins.”

“Okay. Do you want to look at it first?”

I shrugged. “What does the fireworks thing do?”

She shared the inspection:

‘Spark Tube’

x

A tube that shoots sparks like firework, except the sparks are tiny piercing projectiles that can penetrate skin and light stuff on fire.

Make sure you’re pointing it in the right direction.

Uses remaining: 1/5

Weight: 2.3 Pandas

“Eh, you should keep that,” I told her.

“I think I’ll sell it, to be honest. Maybe the Pawn Shops survived the monster invasion.”

“You can thank Gambit for that by the way,” Panda said.

I ignored him. “Did you solve the cube?”

“I did.”

“So, what did it give you?”

She sighed dramatically. “A 3-hour timer...”

“For what?”

“For when it’ll actually open up.”

“That’s kind of dumb.”

“Yeah. But! I did get a new ability from studying the patterns on it!”

‘Puzzle Lock’

x

Moth Verse Ability

Unlocked by a Moth Magician through studying the patterns of locks and puzzles.

Manifest a puzzle lock on any door, chest, or thing that can normally be locked. If a lock already exists where you are trying to manifest the puzzle lock, it will be replaced.

Cooldown: 10 minutes

“That sounds useless,” I told her bluntly.

“It might come in handy,” was all she replied.

“You might be able to use it to unlock stuff, actually,” Panda remarked.

“You know what also opens locks? My fists.”

He groaned in response.

“So, what did you want to do down here?” Bee asked.

“Come on, I’ll show you,” I told her and led the way towards the burning cocoon structure.

After crossing through the sea of flames by using my longboard, with Bee just flying right above it all, we made it to the monitor room, where I immediately began tearing open a hole in the roof so we could get in.

“I’m surprised you could skate across the flames,” Bee said.

“His skateboard defies physics, apparently,” Panda told her.

“It’s not a skateboard,” I remarked, then pulled myself down into the hole.

I came into the strange ventilation tunnel and quickly found the opening I’d made to get to Liam earlier. Bee was right behind me as I landed on a desk below.

Despite the fact that the chamber itself had survived the flames, its interior had not gone unpunished by the monsters I’d aggressively manifested with the Conspiracy Whistle. Only two out of twelve desks had survived, but we only really needed one.

I kicked aside the office chair that had somehow been brought in from outside, then looked at the monitor. It was displaying a guy by the name of ‘William Twine’, who I remembered seeing before, as he looked like a demented Satyr and wielded a bow. He was currently running from a Humanbus that was full of arrows.

“You wanted to show me *this*?” she asked skeptically.

“Not this guy specifically,” I said, clicking one of the three large squishy buttons in front of the monitor to change the perspective. They were like stress toys made from egg sacks and produced a *squelch* every time I pressed one.

I cycled through countless different perspectives in search of the one I was looking for, but I couldn’t find it, even after a full two minutes. One thing that was quite obvious though, was the fact that it only showed people from our Region.

“Maybe there’s a search functionality?” Panda suggested.

Bee reached over and pressed the middle button and the perspective currently being shown on the screen was interrupted by text stating:

WHICH PLAYER WOULD YOU LIKE TO DISPLAY?

“There’s no keyboard,” I muttered, looking around for a way to enter in the name.

“It may be voice activated,” the plushie guessed.

“I’ll try it: Display Player Liam Johnson on the screen.”

DISPLAYING PLAYER: ‘Liam’

The perspective switched to a frontal view of Liam, the man I’d literally just killed, sitting in a brownish-grey paper chair, with a light illuminating mostly just his face. He looked distraught, terrified, and tired.

“What the hell, I thought you killed him!” Panda exclaimed.

A voice carried clearly through the speakers hidden somewhere in the monitor, and it was unmistakable who it belonged to:

Our viewers would like to know how it felt becoming the Lord of Sinners.

Anger shone through Liam’s expression, as his voice sounded through the monitor: “*Why do you keep asking me all these questions!? And where’s Isabella!? You told me I could see her!*”

“What are we watching?” Panda asked, confused. “It looks like the start of a snuff film.”

“It’s a post-death interview!” Bee exclaimed in realization.

“Why can we view it on the monitor for watching Players?” Panda wondered. “That doesn’t seem quite right.”

“And more to the point,” I said, with a devious grin on my face, “*Where* is it taking place within our Region?”

Panda blinked, somehow, before saying, in a very tired voice, “I just realized what he wants to use the Key for...”

“What?” Bee asked.

I pulled the ‘Key to the City’ out of my inventory, squeezed the handle and then proudly said, “*This.*”

A feeling like falling overtook me, with my surroundings turning into pure darkness. I had the vague sensation that I was moving upwards, though I couldn’t really say for sure. I hadn’t put a lot of thought behind exactly where the new Announcer would be located, only that if she did the post-death interview it would take place inside the Castleburg Region.

Fortunately, the Key to the City was extremely vague with where it would allow me to transport, unlike my Back Door ability that required a proper mental image of the place. The result was that I could just tell it to take me to where the Announcer was located.

And that was exactly where I arrived.

Solid ground materialized beneath my feet, and it was akin to the floor of the Healer’s shop, or Riii’s broadcast booth, with a strange toilet-paper feel to it that didn’t make any sound as I walked across it. I had arrived in the shadowy corner of a fairly-large round chamber, and in the middle was the chair that Liam was sitting in, a light on a stand next to him, and the new Announcer seated on a high stool with her feet tucked into her chest.

Unlike Riii, she looked more mature and was slightly taller. Her dark-grey hair was kind of floating around her head and two long curved antennae sprouted from her brow. Iridescent green skin covered her body, with small bumps all over, and two long wings ran down her back and to the floor. Her eyes were iridescent blue and, despite the bored-sounding voice, they had a sinister look to them.

I pulled out my Looking Glass to inspect her:

Level 60	‘Jeza’	Announcer ^x
<p><i>“Do what you’re told.”</i></p> <p>Job: <i>GREAT GAME Announcer</i> Affiliation: <i>Broadcast Department</i></p> <p><i>Unlike most other Wasp Announcers, Jeza is a professional who works for a tangible payment and always gets the job done to the exact specifications given. She doesn’t spend too much time reveling in the cruelty of her job, though she does enjoy it, like any Wasp would. Her onscreen performances are usually ramped up for the audience’s sake.</i></p> <p><i>There aren’t many Jewel Wasps like her among the Announcers, and, thanks to both that and her stellar credentials from past jobs, most of her kin avoid her.</i></p>		

To them, she’s a freak for demanding payment, when she’s already getting to make fun of people dying every day.

She is wary of antagonizing you.

Despite the appraisal claiming she wasn’t as cruel as other Announcers, I still remembered watching her on the screen of the victory lounge making fun of a guy who’d been shot.

I noticed how there were two thick muscular ghost arms hovering around her, similar to the ones that Riii had used, although obviously focused on strength over speed. I had the feeling that taking her down would be more trouble than her predecessor, even if they were the same level.

Her voice filled the entire chamber, as she presented the next question.

A Lust Demon asks:

How did it feel to watch the love of your life die in front of your eyes?

As if to prove the strength and speed of her ghost arms, she instantly reached out with one of them to grab Liam, when he tried to get up off the chair in anger at her latest question.

“Just kill me already!” Liam screamed.

Not yet.

The interview must first be completed.

Then you can see ‘Isabella’ again, in the afterlife.

He roared powerlessly, before a stinger suddenly shot out of Jeza’s outstretched palm and pierced him through the shoulder. He immediately relaxed into his seat, as though the stinger was laced with some kind of drug like what they’d used at the Asylum.

Now that you have calmed down, please answer the question.

I began blowing air into my gauntlet, while watching the exchange a bit longer. To my surprise, Liam became very forthcoming and sincere, as he described how watching me crush Isabella’s head had made him give up his humanity.

It was uncomfortable to listen to, but mostly because, even facing these questions after experiencing the loss of his love, his transformation into a monstrosity, and then death, he was still pretending like he’d had any humanity left to discard.

“I think we’ve heard enough,” I said to Panda.

Without making too much noise, I casually walked up behind Liam and stood there, just outside the cone of light hitting his face. I wondered if Jeza could see in the dark or not, but she wasn’t even really looking at the guy in front of her, instead reading strange text off of an old tablet in her hands.

Something on it must’ve caught her attention though, because she suddenly began to read aloud, while slowly looking up. Her blue eyes met mine and a small surprised grin appeared on her face.

**A viewer asks:
Who is *that* behind you?**

Liam jumped in his seat, despite the calming spike still firmly-lodged in his shoulder. He didn’t turn around though, as if I only existed if he could see me.

“Did you think I’d let you go that easily?” I asked.

Before he could answer, I formed the fingers of my bloated gauntlet into a beak and rammed them into the back of his head while evoking my new ability: “**Under.mine(Virtue)!**”

Although I had been sure the attack would kill him, I hadn’t been certain that the ‘Pump It!’ effect from Brock would increase the power of the ability as well, but that seemed the case as his whole body immediately exploded in a shower of blood and chunks. Jeza and I were both covered, and the chair was stained entirely crimson.

“**Meow,**” said Lordie, and I looked up to see him also coated in it where he sat on my head.

The Announcer wiped her hand across her face, then said:

**Thank you for that.
I wasn’t sure you would come.
But, now that you are here, I have something to tell you:
Find ‘Logan Maximillian’. He’s taking something precious from you right now.**

Despite feeling like I was on top and nothing could hurt me, a pang of dread shot through me at her words. Without even questioning it, I pulled out the Key again and had it take me to Bee. The moment I squeezed it in my hands, it exploded into golden dust that quickly disappeared.

I went back into the darkness, while feeling a sense of moving down into the ground. Just like when Samantha had been killed, I feared that Logan had been waiting for Bee and I to be separated so he could strike and exact his revenge.

Arriving on the somewhat-bouncy web floor of the Broadcast nest, I saw that Bee was still standing exactly where I’d left her.

I looked around frantically, but didn’t see anyone.

“That was cool how he just blew up like that. Is that from your new plugin?” She paused and watched me for a moment, then asked, “What’s wrong?”

“Bring up Logan Maximillian on the monitor!”

Bee brought up the search functionality and spoke the query, making the display change perspective away from the bloody chair Liam had been occupying. As the new scenery came in, I saw that it was a small park near some luxury mansions. I immediately recognized the place, having once used the trees and hedges of the park to avoid watchful eyes.

“Is that—?” Panda started to ask.

“He’s going to the Mayor’s house!” I yelled. “He’s trying to steal my revenge!!”

“Is it far from here?” Bee asked.

“It’s maybe only twenty minutes on my longboard,” I said, “But we have to get going right away!”

On cue, a personal announcement appeared:

Familiar Alert!

‘Lordie’ is **starving!**

You need to feed your **Familiar** within the next 30 minutes or it will **die!**

All at once, I was hit with a wave of exhaustion that dropped me to my knees.

“Gambit, are you okay!?” Bee asked, concerned.

“I need to feed my new pet...”

She finally noticed the seven-fingered hand-spider sitting on top of my head.

“**Meow,**” it said.

—Patreon-exclusive Copy—
—Kristoffer Pauly (aka “Dosei”)—

“Why do you have a hand on your head? And why does it sound like Morgan Freeman?”