

Chapter -81

It felt like a fresh new day as we left the bathroom housing the Safe Zone Terminal and made our way down to the exit of the Mall. The floor, walls, and ceiling were all spotless and shiny after Bee had initiated some kind of mass clean-up procedure, when I’d handed ownership of the Mall to her. Additionally, the air was much cleaner now, as the pervasive scent of death was gone.

There were also new stores that replaced the ones wrecked in the aftermath of the Lord of Sinners’ arrival, and one of them was similar to an arcade, with a sign that said ‘*Come spend your Tokens!*’

Inside were claw machines for various items and vanity stuff like plushies; Gachapon with each machine having a different category of rewards and rarity tiers; consoles with simple retro games that allowed you to challenge other Players and make bets on who’d win; and several other types of pseudo-gambling and lottery-based machines and recreational games.

Although I wanted to use my Safe Zone Tokens, we were in a hurry to get to the neighborhood where the Mayor lived, so we only made one stop on the way towards the exit: the Pharmacy on the second floor.

Behind the counter stood a blue Axolotl, and I’d noticed that many of the other Vendors in the Mall were of the same species, while the guards were generally some manner of crustacean, barring the one jellyfish on the third floor. This guy spoke in a heavy, and probably fake, Spanglish accent and had a pencil-thin black moustache glued above his too-wide mouth.

“I want some Sanity Pills,” Steve demanded, a tinge of desperation in his voice. I’d already told him not to waste any time and this was the only Pharmacy in the Mall, so if they didn’t sell the pills like he’d claimed, then he was shit out of luck.

“I gotchu, amigo. One pill is fifty dinero. Comprendes?”

“Fifty Game Coins?? Are you out of your flipping mind!?”

“Everything around here is expensive,” I told him.

“Or maybe you’re just poor,” Panda mused.

“I couldn’t do anything about the prices,” Bee said. “And the cut that the Owner gets from all sales in the Safe Zone is only accessible for upgrades.”

“Wait, did you spend your own coins on the clean-up and the new stores?” I asked, while Steve was in the middle of a ‘*Let me speak to your manager*’ speech.

“No, there were already coins inserted into the Terminal. I think maybe Samantha put her coins in there before she died. She was on her way to see us, so maybe she was going to ask about what upgrades we’d have liked?”

I wouldn’t mourn Samantha’s death, but despite her fake Greater Good spiel, she was definitely a better companion than the Birthday Brat currently living up to his name.

Before he could get us banned from the store, I went over and tapped him on the back of his bald head.

“Knock the shit off and just pay for the pills, Steve.”

He spun around, red in the face from yelling at the Vendor. In the background, the Axolotl seemed completely chill about the situation.

“Don’t make me leave you here,” I told him, already regretting letting him tag along with us.

That got him to immediately realize what he was doing and within the next five seconds he’d purchased three pills and parted with a hundred-and-fifty Coins. Even though our System-enhanced bodies didn’t need to rely on food as much and there were no bills or rent to pay, spending the Game Coins *did* feel a lot like spending sorely-needed cash. My bet was also that he barely had any left after the purchase, but if he ended up going insane then it didn’t matter how many Coins he’d collected.

While he was taking the pills from the Vendor, Bee was studying them in fascination, muttering about the ‘symbols’. Her Moth Manic passive was making her quite odd.

“Is there something wrong with them?” Steve asked her, not knowing why she was looking so intently at the pills.

“I’m just deciphering the patterns,” she replied without facing him.

He glanced to me for an explanation, and I said, without skipping a beat, “You don’t see the patterns?”

“Stop,” Panda said, although he was laughing, “You’re going to make him go insane if you antagonize him too much.”

“Let me see one of those,” I said, stepping forward and inspecting one. The pills were surprisingly-big and I got the uncanny sense that they were suppositories...

‘Sanity Pill’

x

*Although there are many different ways to lower one’s
Insanity Gauge, they are often ineffective or hard to come by.*

*As a result, the Merchant’s Guild came up with this sanity-in-a-pill to provide **Players** a reliable way to stay sane.*

Just don’t ask them how they’re made.

Lowers Insanity Gauge by 20%

Uses remaining: 1/1

Weight: 0.5 Pandas

“...Yeeees, interesting symbols.”

“Gambit, stop imitating me. You can’t even see what I’m seeing.”

“Actually, what *are* you seeing?” I wondered.

“It’s like those memory games, but with 3D shapes that are constantly spinning. I have to study the rotations and matching pairs to decipher the verse hidden in the totality of the pattern.”

“...What?”

“I got it,” she then said a second later and stood back straight to her full height.

Steve looked at her. “I’ve been meaning to ask, but *who* are you?”

He turned to me. “Where’s the beetle?”

“I *was* the beetle,” she explained. “I evolved into a moth.”

Again, Steve looked to me for guidance.

I just shrugged. “Don’t ask me how evolutions work. It makes no sense to me either.”

“Speaking of evolutions,” Panda said. “You’ve still got yours waiting for you.”

I began walking towards the door of the Pharmacy, while saying, “I’ll do it as soon as I’ve dealt with Logan.”

“Who is this Logan guy we’re after?” Steve asked as he fell into step behind me, not seeming to question that I was talking to something he couldn’t see.

“Logan Maximillian,” Bee told him.

“The Madeville Trolls’ quarterback?”

I paused in the doorway. “What?”

“There was a guy on the Madeville team with that name. I think he was also a model.”

“That’s the guy,” Panda answered, even though Steve couldn’t hear him.

“Yeah, we’re going to kill him before he can steal my revenge.”

I continued moving out of the store and towards the nearby escalators.

“What revenge?” he asked, as we got onto the rolling steps.

“Gambit is going to kill the Mayor.”

Steve halted at her words, and from the expression on his face it was clear he’d had an epiphany.

“Fudge... you’re *that guy*! The **nutcase** with the screwdriver!”

I clenched my fist and Brock made a small squeal in anticipation.

“Just my luck, picking you guys to follow! A **lunatic** and a **monster**! I never understood why Annabella was so afraid of you, but now it all makes sense! Man... Of all the people, it just had to be y—!”

He was only two steps behind me on the escalator, when I spun around and uppercutted him in the groin. The sound that escaped his mouth was like that of a dog toy being stepped on, but there seemed to be no actual damage inflicted. It was lucky for him, else he would’ve turned into a fine red mist.

SAFE ZONE ALERT!

Violent act detected!

You have been expelled from ‘Serenity Park Mall’ and received a 30-minute Ban.

A repeat offense will result in a 1-day Ban.

I landed on my feet outside of the automatic doors to the Mall.

“Worth it,” I muttered. “Fuck that guy.”

Congratulations! You have unlocked an achievement! ^x
<i>‘Bad Neighbor’</i> Got Expelled from a Safe Zone.
<i>To be utterly transparent, we support the behavior that just got you expelled.</i>
<i>Unfortunately, the GREAT GAME is bound by several rules that govern how it functions, such as the ‘Humane Extinction</i>

*of Sentient Species Act’ that allows **Safe Zones** to operate the way they do, despite putting a damper on the fun.*

*If you manage to utilize your **glitched** nature to actually break the **Safe Zone** protections, then we will reward you handsomely.*

Reward: ‘Safe Zone Token’

Bee came skipping out through the doors, while the sounds of loud pathetic sobbing echoed in the hallway inside the mall.

“Thanks for that,” she told me.

“I knew it was dumb to allow him to tag along, and look how much time we wasted because of him.”

“So, what now? How are you going to find Logan?”

“I was just planning on heading to the Mayor’s house,” I told her.

“I actually don’t think the Mayor is there,” Panda remarked. “If he *had* been there, don’t you think Logan would’ve killed him by now? Also, remember how the announcement stated that the Mayor was a Roaming Boss? He’s probably not just hanging out at home.”

“So? What other way do we have of finding him?”

“Look in your inventory,” Panda said. “It should be the first item on the list.”

I pulled up my inventory, and, sure enough, I had the perfect item right there.

‘Wanted Poster’ x

A wanted poster with no face or name on it... yet.

*Allows you to mark another Player or **GREAT GAME** Entity anywhere on the world of “Dirt” for a full day, making them visible to anyone from afar thanks to a beacon of light above their heads.*

Weight: 0.1 Pandas

“I forgot I had this,” I muttered, before pulling it into my hands.

Using the poster was kind of strange, as it manifested a red pen in my hand with which I had to draw the face of the person and their name. I sat down on the ground in front of the Mall doors, with the Serenity Park entrance just a few feet away, and began drawing Logan from memory. Afterwards I added his full name below.

“Huh, you’re actually quite good at drawing,” Panda said in surprise.

Bee bent over my shoulder to look. “That’s very detailed, but...”

“What?”

“She’s probably wondering why it looks like you drew Danny DeVito,” Panda explained.

“I don’t think the drawing matters,” I said, lifting the Wanted Poster up in the air to look at it.

The pen in my hand vanished, and a moment later the poster vanished too.

WARNING TO ALL CASTLEBURG PLAYERS!

Player ‘Gambit’ has marked ‘Logan Maximillian’ as a Wanted Man and triggered a public Manhunt Quest!

The first person to hunt down the Marked Player will receive a unique reward.

To join in on the Manhunt, simply pick up one of the Wanted Posters that have appeared across the city.

The result wasn’t quite what I’d expected, and having other Players join in could spell trouble. Although I would be lying if I didn’t enjoy the idea of the guy being chased through the city by a mob of Players.

I spun around to look for the pillar of light and found that it was in nearly the opposite direction of the Mayor’s house.

“Where the hell is Logan going?” I wondered.

“Do you guys hear buzzing?” Bee asked.

The drone of countless massive winged vehicles was coming from the north all of a sudden, as though an armada had taken to the sky the moment I stepped outside of the Safe Zone.

“Let’s get going before they get here,” I said, bringing out my longboard.

“Is it the Agents again?”

“Something like that,” I replied vaguely, fully knowing what was coming our way.