

Chuck-9

I look at the last item of the combat log again as I walk.

You have killed Vosco Monso, Level 2 Ranger. You have gained 2000 XP

Knowing the name of the man I killed engenders mixed emotions. I should know his name, but I also want him to still be a stranger. Not to have to think of the other Monso who won't get to spend time with him again.

But the experience I got out of it is what scares me. I don't have to look far for the other time I gained experience.

You have killed an Attrach, Fire (minor). You gain 666 XP.

That thing hurt me more than Vosco did, was just as easy to kill and worth less than a third. Is it a coincidence that I got a thousand times his level, or are people inherently worth more than creatures to this system?

I hope it's a coincidence because the ramifications of killing people to gain experience are scary. How many would I need to kill to go up a level? If I got my hands on a gun and shot someone from two hundred meters, would I get as much, or was it because we were close, so there was a chance he could hurt me.

Terry keeps talking about how this system works like a video game. Is it designed to get us to exterminate one another? As much as I don't want it to happen, it will take another fight, possibly more, until I can figure out how this works.

"You're being broody," Hanz says, catching up to me. I glare at him. "Okay, you do tend to brood a lot." He grins. "But seems you have more on your mind since that fight this morning."

"I killed a man." I almost snap.

"You defended yourself. I doubt that was what you planned on doing. And you'd been shot."

"It doesn't excuse what I did."

The orc sighs. "Call it mitigating circumstances. I think whatever this system is, it's created an 'end of the world' scenario. We're going to see the ugliness people are able to commit before things get better; if they do."

I'm tempted to tell him about the experience. Having someone else to think things through would help, but I don't need my father's voice to know it's a bad idea. What if I give him the idea to kill someone that way, so he can check. I suspect he's right about what we'll have to deal with before a semblance of normal returns.

If it ever does.

"Can I ask you a question?" Hanz ask.

I shrug, eying my willpower.

“Why hadn’t you asked me about this?” he motions to his body.

“What race you pick isn’t my business. We have a kid who chose to look like a werewolf, there’s the fox lady, and that’s not to say anything of those who didn’t ask to be changed.”

“I’m pretty sure you know that’s not what I mean. Everyone who noticed me before this happened has asked.”

I sigh and the green bar dips a sliver. I call up my inventory, hoping there’s something to eat in there. Nothing magically appeared since the last time I checked.

“What you identify as is none of my business,” I state. “That means species, gender, or whatever other criteria you want to use. I’ve dealt with enough labels growing up I’m not going to start assigning them to you.” No matter what that voice in my head tells me.

“Unless the way you look isn’t what you want to be identified with, that’s what I’m going with.”

“That’s pretty progressive of you.”

“No, it isn’t. I just don’t want to deal with the bullshit labels create. I have better things to spend my energy on.”

“Tolerance through anger?”

I chuckle. “I think more of it as through practicality.” Something catches my attention in the distance over the highway. No details, but we’ve been walking long enough, a few more kilometers and we should be able to restock.

Or have to fight with more people so we can get anything out of it.

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The sight before me doesn’t look good, but also not as bad as I’d expected, I realize. There was a fight in the parking lot of the Walmart. Cars are overturned, scorched marks indicate where something exploded. A car seems to have been turned into glass, then shattered. The parking lot is half full, including the destruction.

The Walmart itself looks intact.

I can’t say the same for the Lowe’s next to it. Whatever fight might have happened here, could have started in it.

I told Hanz I’d scout ahead to make sure there wasn’t an ambush waiting for us so I’d be alone for a while. If they don’t stop to check the stores between here and the highway, I have half an hour before the crowd gets here.

Thirty minutes to get something for myself without having to explain anything. If no one gets in my way. I hurry through the parking lot, barbell in hand. I need something better, not that it’s let me down yet. I run for the doors, I’ll get in, put as much in my inventory as I can, and get out before the others get here. They’re going to question and argue and never realize that without that food, I might be more dangerous to them than the creatures that might be roaming since they won’t leave me alone.

Just get the stuff and move on, my father tells me. And I am tempted to listen. Not for the first time, in my life. I decide not to, simply because he’s the one suggesting it.

The roar comes after the explosion and I’m on my back, cursing. I should have been more careful. I use the bar to push myself to my feet. The pavement exploded outward and

something black and tarlike pulls itself out of it.

Run away, my father advises.

I don't. Not to be contrary, but because that thing is between me and the door. Me and food, and I'm fed up with things not going my way. When it's partially out of the hole it's in, it roars at me again. I roar back and run at it. This time something's going to pay for missing me off.

I swing at it, connect and pieces fly off. I jump back to get out of the way of its swing, land on something and I'm on my back. Cursing again.

I am really getting fed up.

On my way to my feet, I see the tire, broken off a car. Grab it, and throw it at the creature as hard as I can. It flies through it, taking another chunk along. Is that thing actually made of tar?

I'm on my feet and back away, looking for something else to throw. One of the posts for the handicapped parking has been torn out of the ground and there is a block of cement at the end. I send the bar to my inventory and pick that up. It's got more weight to it. With an overhead throw, I hit its head, and it goes right through.

I curse as it reforms.

It's out of the hole and is around Bernard's height. I'd expected it to be bigger, but I need to find something to throw at it. Those chunks I'm breaking off, have to cost it hit points. This would be a lot easier if I had a way to—I stop the thought, now is not the time to trigger a system message to answer a question.

One of the concrete bars separating the parking spaces is within reach, but the broken pieces are still too large for me to lift. A sit that's been ripped out of a car is the next thing I throw as it advances toward me. It bats it aside.

Yeah, that was too light. I throw carts, then have to step around an overturned pickup and nearly stumble over the broken axle. I start to move away, then stop. The axle is disconnected from the pickup, one wheel well is all that's keeping it in place. With the tires still on, it's nothing more than a barbell with weights attached to it.

I pull on it and the siding rips. I nearly drop it as the weight still surprises me, but then I have it in both hands and step away. I'm going to need space to swing this thing around.

The tar creature moves slowly, following me nearly mindlessly.

I find empty spots and move my grip to one end of the shaft and realize I didn't think this through. With the tire in place, it's in the way of me holding this properly. I'm not abandoning this as a weapon, I just have to switch tactics. The space is still going to be useful.

I grab the tire firmly and start spinning. At first, the other wheel rolls along on the ground but as the momentum builds it lifts. Keeping track of the creature is harder than I expected as I focus on not being pulled off balance by the increasing weight in my hands.

I let go before it slips out of my grip and as I fight to stop spinning, I know my aim is off. The assembly only clips it, but still takes part of its shoulder out, along with the arm, which regrew.

Only the creature shrinks in the process.

So it is getting hurt.

I need more heavy things to throw at it. Anything that gives me trouble lifting I throw. My stamina drops faster than it regenerates, but I can't slow. The smaller it gets, the faster it is and when it's a little smaller than I am, I can't keep enough distance. I have my barbell in hand again and I swing it.

I don't make contact often, but when I do, what I rip out reduces its size noticeably. When it hits me, I find out that it still has strength as a fifth of my health disappears with that blow. I swing at its head, and another chunk comes off. I get in another hit, ripping half its arm as it hits me hard enough to stagger me back. I have trouble breathing and my health is below a quarter.

I do what I can to prepare myself for the next attack, but I now wish I had listened to my father's voice.

It takes a step in my direction and leaves some of itself behind, it loses cohesiveness with each step, and never reaches me.