

Chapter -10

Two things went through my head as I slowly crawled backward from the giant glowing eye that shone its attention through the gap in the storefront shutters:

1 – It was so much bigger and scarier than I had expected it would be.

2 – Annabella had been right, it did look vaguely like Catbus from ‘Totoro’, but the nightmarish eldritch-horror remake...

[NEXT STOP: MY TUMMY, YUMMY-YUMMY!]

“Gambit, is that what I think it is?” Panda asked, waddling over towards me as I was crawling backward.

I immediately grabbed him and ran towards the back of the store, just as the light shining through the gap disappeared. Gritting my teeth hard, I jumped as high as I could, only for the whole world to explode in sound, light, and movement, as the enormous human-skinned sentient bus rammed through the store façade, crushing all the neat rows of clothes, bringing down part of the roof, and breaking the wall to the jewelry store next door.

Somehow, I avoided being crushed or swallowed by the massive bus monster, and landed on its ‘roof’, which was unnervingly-hairy, like my old neighbor Mike’s back. There was only a small gap between its back and the ceiling, and I slid on the spongy skin, falling down to the floor a moment later, as it barreled into the backroom, before beginning to make a slow turn to come back.

“Oh, god, Gambit, we’ve gotta go!”

“Yeah, no shit!” I yelled as I sprinted out through the hole that’d been a shuttered door and window seconds ago.

The loud-as-hell voice rang out again from the back of the ruined tailor shop, while I bolted down the sidewalk, trying to put as much distance between myself and the monster.

[NEXT STOP: DON’T RUN WHEN YOU CAN TAKE THE BUS!]

“Don’t listen to it!”

“I wasn’t going to!” I yelled, before kicking off from the ground in a leap that sent me just high enough that I could grab hold of a storefront sign and crawl up onto the roof of the building. From there I continued running down parallel to the street, while sounds from behind made it obvious the bus was in pursuit.

“You think it’s tracking me with the goddamn beacon?” I asked.

“Could be. Hey, I have an idea, bring out the Looking Glass.”

“What?”

“Just do it.”

“*Inventory*,” I said, maneuvering through the screen while trying not to trip on the flat roofs I was parkouring across. I selected the Looking Glass and it dropped into my hand.

“What now?”

“Stop for a second and look at it. Maybe it’ll tell you how to escape it or something.”

“That’s stupid, I’m not doing that. If I slow down, it’ll catch me.”

“Just be really quick!”

I skidded to a halt, spun on the heel of my new fancy shoes, then lifted the Looking Glass up in front of my right eye and stared at the rapidly-approaching monstrosity:

Level 62	‘Humanbus’	World Boss ^x
<p><i>“[YUMMY-YUMMY, ANOTHER HUMAN FOR MY TUMMY!]”</i></p> <p><i>A ‘Humanbus’ is what happens when we let the System do its own thing during the transformation of a world in preparation for the GREAT GAME. A lot of it is automated y’see, because it’s a lot of work to transform a whole planet.</i></p> <p><i>A fascinating thing about a ‘Humanbus’ is that it grows stronger the more it eats. They start out at Level 55, which should tell you everything you need to know about the one you’re currently dealing with.</i></p> <p><i>My main advice for when dealing with a ‘Humanbus’ is: RUN. But if you do try to fight it, we’ll be sure to record your death and replay it on our monitors here at the office.</i></p> <p><i>That’s right, we have an office. We’re civilized, after all.</i></p>		

As soon as the pop-up appeared, I tossed the Looking Glass back into my inventory and continued running down the rooftops, while Panda read the description out loud for me, and quite frankly did a terrible impression of the bus’s creepy ear-splitting voice.

“Wait... the people running this ‘Great Game’, have an office??”

“It’s good to know we aren’t dealing with barbarians at least,” Panda mused.

[NEXT STOP: I CAN SMELL YOU!]

“You don’t have a nose, you creep!” Panda heckled it from atop my shoulder.

I clicked the pop-up away and then quickly threw all my clothes into my inventory, feeling a massive boost of energy and speed, while Panda shamefully covered his beady eyes.

SKILL TRIGGER!

BIRTHDAY_SUIT is now in full effect!

It felt as though a fire was coming out between my cheeks as I flew four yards with every stride that I took across the rooftops, but the Humanbus wouldn’t lose track of me so long as the beacon shone above my head. Plus, I didn’t have infinite stamina, let alone enough for more than a minute of running, exhausted as I already was.

“Panda! What’s the nearest public facility around here?”

The wind whooshed past my ears to an almost deafening extent, but I somehow still heard his answer. “To the left at the end of the road and then a few blocks down is a kindergarten.”

“Why do you know that??”

“I don’t like what you’re implying with that tone!” Panda shouted, as I spun forty-five degrees left on my heel, all my non-family-friendly bits swishing with the sudden change in momentum, then I zoomed towards the edge of the roof and leapt.

I ended up flying across the road and even clearing the rooftops of the buildings on the other side, landing in a back-alley in a tumble that scraped my naked skin all over.

“Auch, auch, auch!” I whimpered, then ran down the alleyway, until I came out into a new smaller street, which I followed until I reached a larger road that took me in the direction Panda had indicated. In the distance, the bright headlights of the Humanbus shone over the tops of the buildings, while its loud voice kept calling out for me, though I thankfully couldn’t hear it well enough to pick out words.

My breathing was ragged by the time I found the kindergarten, but I had made it here in record time. With my BIRTHDAY_SUIT in full effect, I was easily the fastest person alive at the moment, though it would probably change once more Players began investing into their movement speed.

When I began walking up to the front door of the surprisingly-large institution, Panda tapped me on my cheek and said, “What the hell are you doing, Gambit??”

“What? I’m going in here to hide from the bus, obviously.”

“Like *that*?” he asked, gesturing down my body.

“Oh...” Even in an apocalypse, there were still some things you just didn’t do.

I pulled up my inventory and clicked one of the two suits I’d stashed away. As soon as I pulled it out of the screen, it popped into existence on my body, probably because I had unequipped it using the inventory before.

With my propriety restored, I pushed open the glass door to the kindergarten and walked in. It struck me, right as the Dungeon announcement appeared, that I could probably use my Looking Glass to get a read on the potential challenge before just going in headfirst.

WARNING!

Now entering level 10 Dungeon ‘Bungo’s Playroom’!