

Chapter -55

Level 14	'Samantha'	Player ^x
<p><i>“I just want a cold beer, is that too much to ask for!?”</i></p> <p>Class: <i>Involuntary Protagonist</i> Main Attribute(s): <i>Strength, Vitality, & Defense</i></p> <p><i>Every region has one. A protagonist. They aren't chosen deliberately, it's more like a lottery that the winners have no say in. Included in their skill-set is the uncanny ability to always be in the right place at the right time, and always somehow ending out on top. However, they are also cursed with always being in the spotlight and having the System antagonize them nonstop.</i></p> <p><i>Before the GREAT GAME, Samantha worked at an office doing office-related things. In the small scheme of Castleburg, she was rather influential, having ties to both the Police and the Mayor's political party. She was actually pretty fulfilled, even though she worked eighty-hour weeks.</i></p> <p><i>Now she's on the warpath to conquer the GREAT GAME and defeat the System that cursed her beautiful life. You know, it's weird, most Players chosen to become Protagonists are quite happy about it, but not Samantha. She's a real sour one.</i></p> <p><i>She recognizes your face.</i></p>		

“How did you find this?” Bee asked Samantha. “Did you do the puzzle as well?”

“Puzzle? What puzzle?” her voice had a tone like someone who were used to their orders being followed without question. It immediately set off alarm-bells in my head, but I couldn't quite place it until I read the part of the appraisal about her ties to the Police and the Mayor.

“You!” I yelled, pointing at her.

“Ah, shit,” muttered Panda. “Bee, you might want to stop him before he tries to kill her.”

Samantha looked away from Bee to glare at me. Then her carefully-plucked eyebrows lifted in recognition. “What are *you* doing here?”

“You know Gambit?” Bee asked, ignoring Panda's warning.

“Gambit? That's *you*?”

“This dumb bitch had me evicted from my apartment!” I shouted. “I had to sell my fridge magnets and give away Kevin because of her!”

“Don’t be mad at me for just doing my job, you social parasite!”

“Woah, that’s very hostile language from the both of you,” Bee said, trying to be a mediator.

Samantha looked at her again. “Are you actually human? I’ve killed quite a few things that looked like you.”

“I *was*, but then I got this class and now I’m like this.”

“Step aside, Bee,” I said, flexing the fingers inside the balloon gauntlet.

“Hold up, Gambit,” Panda said, sitting backwards on her shoulder, forming an X with his arms.

“Maybe you don’t have to fight her.”

“You know what she did, Panda! Don’t try to stop me!”

“Panda?” Samantha asked. “Who’s Panda?”

Bee pointed at her shoulder. “This guy.”

“Who? There’s nothing there.”

“She can’t see him,” I growled, ready to pounce as soon as Bee moved aside from the cubicle’s opening.

“Ah. You are both turning insane,” Samantha realized, taking a step back. The crowbar in her hands transformed into a two-handed sword. I wondered if it was her unique weapon unlocked from the Weaponlution Event.

“Guys, you don’t want to fight her!” Panda yelled. “Her Class makes it sound like she’s destined to win!”

Bee seemed to consider the merit of his words, then she turned around to look at me for guidance. In the same instant, Samantha activated a skill that made a golden aura appear around her body.

“*Gotcha!*” I yelled and the effect vanished from her immediately.

gasm.org Activated!

Ability Stolen: **Cheat Death**

Original Player: **Samantha**

“Hey, what the hell!” she yelled. “That has a really long cooldown!”

I ignored her and quickly said the activation phrase: “*Catch it!*”

The golden glow that’d overtaken her just a couple seconds earlier now covered my body, along with a strange sensation of invulnerability.

“Wait a minute,” I said, realizing what kind of ability this was. “The System gave you a fucking Cheat Death ability!?”

“And so what? I didn’t have a say in it, but what, I’m not meant to use it??”

“That’s clearly unfair treatment,” Bee agreed.

Samantha sighed and lowered her sword, transforming it into a pencil that she twirled between her fingers, before depositing it behind her right ear. I remembered seeing her play with the very same pencil once when we’d talked at the City Hall in downtown Castleburg, exactly one week prior to my eviction. The gesture rekindled my hatred for the city and those who ran it.

“This stupid System is treating me like this all the time,” she muttered, clearly frustrated. “Like, I went in here as soon as the Event ended, only to get hopelessly lost. But, wouldn’t you know it? I just *happened* to find the right door anyway!”

She sighed again.

“Yeah, your life is very hard, because you get everything you want.”

“Fuck you ‘Gambit’,” she replied. She definitely remembered my real name, but chose to use my new one instead.

“I thought you were just some lowly municipality penpusher, but your appraisal says you were chummy with both the Police and the Mayor.”

“Appraisal?” she asked.

“You got a Looking Glass, didn’t you?”

“Oh, *that* thing.”

She pulled out her magnifying glass and looked at us through it.

“This is kind of a relief,” she then said, apparently commenting on the text she read about us. “Just like how I know the System is favoring me, I can tell it wants to get rid of you, cause you’re some kind of stick in the machinery. Granted, it says you’re literally insane, both of you, which the mention of an invisible panda makes me inclined to believe. But the rest is clearly bogus. It’s trying to pit me against you.”

Bee nodded. “It did the same with these two other people we ran into, and they created a mob to hunt us down, but then we killed a lot of them!”

“Gambit there is no stranger to mobs,” Samantha commented. “You should’ve seen the group of crazies that his very-public arrest created.”

“I didn’t know that,” I replied, momentarily wrongfooted.

“Your unhinged conspiracy drivel really brought them out of the woodworks. Apparently your arrest was proof that the deep state was silencing its biggest critics and violating the first amendment. They were conveniently ignoring the fact that you tried to kill the Mayor. Of course, once the Police Chief revealed you also killed his dog, the protests died down quickly.”

“I was framed! I didn’t kill his dog!”

“I know,” she replied.

“You were in on the conspiracy!” I yelled, pushing past Bee and making Samantha draw the pencil from behind her ear, turning it into a sword in the same motion.

“Gambit, you goddamn moron! Just stop for a moment!” Panda pleaded.

I turned my head to look at where he still sat on Bee’s shoulder, now facing forward.

“She’s probably a Skinstealer like the Mayor and Police Chief!” I told him.

“I’m not a Skinstealer,” she said, her voice calm despite the situation.

“I don’t think she’s one either,” Bee added.

I paused. “Why not?”

“Because if she was, why would she be in here to kill the Police Chief?”

“Hmm... that *does* make sense.”

“Actually, I’m only in here to get a Safe Zone Sphere,” she said. “I don’t know if the Police Chief is the boss or what, but frankly I don’t care. I’ll kill anything that stands in my way. So, cut this shit and tell me the code.”

Bee looked at me. “Let’s call a truce, right?”

I gritted my teeth. “She ruined my life, Bee.”

Samantha sighed, but didn’t say anything.

“I know I might be shooting myself in the foot here,” Panda started, “But I’m willing to bet that there’s only one Sphere in this Dungeon. You might want to negotiate before you open the way for her. That is, if you actually know the code. You do, right Bee?”

“I do,” she confirmed.

“Do what?” asked Samantha.

Bee turned to look at her. “If we help you get through this door and get the Safe Zone Sphere, you need to help us kill the Mayor and get another.”

“Fuck that!” she replied.

“We can also just fight over who gets to use the door,” I told her. “And I took away your cheat ability, so you’ll definitely die.”

Samantha transformed the sword back into a pencil again. She twirled it between her index and thumb for a bit, clearly thinking it over.

“Fine. We have a deal. I was planning to go kill that bastard anyway. I never got the bonus I was promised and I want to kick him in the dick for what he did at last year’s Christmas party.”

I nodded slowly. “I’ll turn you into paste if you try to renege on our deal.”

Samantha stared back at me, clearly not afraid, then she asked, rather confused, “Is that a balloon on your hand?”

“*Oy, fak yuu, ya slag!!*”

“She can’t hear you, Brock,” Bee said as she walked over to the door in the middle of the empty cubicle and began tapping away on the codelock. I couldn’t tell exactly what she was pressing, but I guessed it was the order of numbers in which we’d found the outlier cubicles earlier.

“The balloon talks as well?” Samantha asked.

“Maybe you should consider making her slightly more insane,” Panda suggested.

“Good idea,” I replied.

Samantha shook her head, clearly regretting partnering with Bee and I, but it was too late for her to back out now.

“Got it!” Bee exclaimed.

Instead of the door opening, it seemed to release some sort of pulsating energy that transformed our surroundings in the blink of an eye.

I looked around at the cubicle that’d now become a temporary holding cell. I recognized the room from the carving I’d left in the white wall over a year ago, after smuggling a nail into the building in my shoe.

No sooner had the maze of cubicles turned into the Police Headquarters than we heard shuffling steps from outside our cell. I didn’t wait for the monsters outside to break in, but instead walked up to the closed door and punched it with Brock so hard that it shot off its hinges and out into the hallway beyond, crushing two monsters that’d been awaiting us.

I turned back to look at Bee and Samantha.

“Okay, it’s not *just* a balloon. Noted.”

“Let’s go,” I said.