

Chapter -21

I let out a grunt as I landed on a hard stone floor. Light came from above, cast by floating glowing flies, and lit up my surroundings, which seemed to be the ruins that I’d seen within the massive cavern from the amphitheater. I got to my feet and looked around, realizing I was in some kind of nonsensical area, given how the paths around me didn’t venture straight, but rather snaked and zigzagged around with no rhyme-or-reason. It was almost as if the ruins weren’t built by masons, but rather by some bizarre aliens. Even the stones were curved and bent in odd ways to accommodate the shapes of the various hallways.

Before I could go anywhere, two things appeared in the palms of my hands. In my right was an old-timey pocket-watch and in my left was a knife, like the kind you use to chop vegetables with.

I flipped open the lid of the watch with my thumb nail and the following text appeared above its revealed clockface:

Time remaining:

5.47923009E-6 Millennium

Kills remaining:

25

I sighed. “...It’s nonsense. Not sure why I expected anything else, to be honest.”

“You mean to tell me you don’t know how to convert millennia to hours?”

“And you do??”

“Obvio, my dear Caracol.”

“...What?”

“It says 47 hours 59 minutes 53 seconds.”

I closed the lid and stuffed the pocket-watch in my... pocket. Then I looked at the knife I’d been given.

“*This* is my weapon?” I wondered. “It doesn’t look like much.”

“*Ye mum’s a slag, ya dawg cunt!!*” the knife suddenly yelled. “*Imma purrfect fakkin Queenslander Excalibur!!*”

“Ahh shit... the knife fucking talks.”

“Hey that’s *my* role! I’m supposed to be the one that berates you!” Panda exclaimed, offended.

“*You can fak off ‘n all!!*”

I switched the knife to my right hand and tried to be amicable with my new companion. “I’m Gambit, what’s your name?”

“*It’s Brock, ya non-hand-lotion-using troglodyte!!*”

“Where’s the mute button on this thing?” Panda wondered. He was back to sitting on my shoulder again, though I hadn’t noticed him crawl up there.

“*Fak yuu!!*”

“*Inspect*,” I said while focusing on the knife.

‘Brock’ x
<p><i>This is your weapon for the WEAPONLUTION GAME.</i></p> <p>...</p> <p><i>You were meant to receive a gun, but, ehh, something went wrong.</i></p> <p>...</p> <p><i>I’m sure it’ll be fine.</i></p> <p>Level:</p> <p>0</p> <p>Evolutions:</p> <p>N/A</p>
<p>Length: 3 inches</p> <p>Weight: 1 Panda</p>

“Wait... I was meant to receive a gun??”

“*When’s the stabbing begin!?*”

“I thought the glitches were working in my favor,” I muttered, looking at the vegetable chopper verbally abusing me. “They made me bring a knife to a goddamn gunfight... and it’s not even an impressive knife...”

“*Oy, fak yuu!! Imma two-inch champion, Nigel!! Jab me in someone’s carotid, and it don’t matter what length I am!!*”

“My name’s Gambit, not Nigel.”

“Does it seem like I give two shits?? You could be her Majesty the Queen for all I care!!”

“She’s dead,” Panda commented.

“You takin’ the piss??”

“It’s true,” I replied.

“That’s proper sad, as a matter of fact.”

“Alright, I’m over it. Let’s go stab some dawgs!!”

“Might as well get to it,” I agreed and began to make my way down one of the paths that surrounded the intersection where I’d landed.

“Hold up, Gambit, what about the ethics of this whole thing? You’re gonna have to kill other Players!”

“So?”

“What do you mean ‘So’??”

“It’s either me or them,” I replied calmly. My mind was already made up about this. Besides, it wasn’t like anyone had helped me in my time of need, so I would just protect myself and Bee, and not put my neck out for strangers who might shoot me in the back as soon as I looked away.

“But maybe there’s a way you can save everyone!” Panda insisted desperately.

“Oy, Jiminy Cricket, you heard Nigel. All these nongs out here bouta be stabbed!!”

“You’re a literal talking weapon, so of course you’d advocate for murder!”

“That’s actually a very harmful stereotype, Jiminy. Do I like murder? Yes, of course. But I also like cats. I think you’ll find that Imma a very complex individual.”

“Panda, since when did you care about anyone else?”

“I’m just saying, you ought to have some moral dilemma right here! What if it was Bee you had to fight!?”

“That’d be different. But why should I care about people who helped support an evil government that condones mocking sick people and locking them away!?”

“Not everyone has a choice, Gambit.”

“There’s always a choice!” I told him, feeling my face starting to flush with anger.

“Fellas... I’m fakkin bored. Can we go kill something now?”

I gritted my teeth and squeezed the plastic grip of the vegetable knife, then began stomping down the strange hallway. Panda didn’t say anything further, as he had no doubt realized the futility of

trying to change my mind. Besides, I wasn't some grand hero here to save humanity. I was just trying to stay alive and expecting anything else of me was absurd.

The stone bricks under my feet were glossy-smooth like glass, as though hundreds of feet had worn them down over centuries, but still had just enough grit that my shoes didn't slip. The walls were of a similar nature, and the dark-greenish-grey color made it almost feel like these weren't chiseled by skilled workers, but rather grown as though part of some organism or plant. From floor-to-ceiling was about thirteen feet and there were no decorations anywhere nor any windows or doors, just a hallway that followed a ponderous path, and occasionally branched off to veer in new directions.

“I think it's a maze of some sort,” I remarked, mostly to myself.

No sooner had I said that than my current route brought me to a large open chamber where the floor sloped down into a bowl of sorts and round pillars connected the ceiling to the floor.

“Don't move!” someone suddenly yelled and I instinctively turned to face them.

It was a man in his forties wearing an ill-fitting blue polo and dark shorts. The skin of his neck, arms, and legs were covered in the tell-tale signs of the healing stitches. He was aiming a gun at me, but not the kind of gun that I'd expected.

“Is *that* a flintlock?” Panda asked, confused.

A tense moment passed, where my previously-stated morals were put to the test, and I failed.

Bang!

Something burst out the side of the polo shirt guy's head, sending brain matter and blood onto the nearby wall, before he collapsed to the ground and his gun became blue particles that flowed in the same direction, towards his killer.

I spotted the man, who was partially obscured by a pillar about fifteen yards away, begin to reload his own flintlock, while clicking on some unseen screen in front of him as the blue particles flew into his weapon. Fortunately for me, the reloading was no straight-forward affair.

Kicking off from the floor in a high jump, I sailed towards the guy, just in time to see how the barrel of his flintlock widened and he turned to aim it towards me. But he hadn't expected me to jump into the air, which threw him off for just long enough that I could close the distance.

As I came within just eight feet, he swiveled the barrel of his blunderbuss-looking gun at my head and I quickly ducked low enough to plant both of my hands on the floor.

Blam!!

Hot air and smoke flew over my head, while the sound of projectiles *plinking* off the pillars and walls behind me echoed around the chamber. I pushed myself up and lunged for his throat with my pathetic knife, following Brock’s instructions of aiming for the carotid artery.

My vegetable knife dug into the man’s neck and sent a pressurized jet of blood out, before he collapsed to the floor and his blunderbuss dissolved into particles that were absorbed by my knife.

It was only then that I realized that the guy was no older than nineteen, with some youthful stubble on his cheek and a shabby hoodie with a print that was flaking off.

I let out a frustrated sigh.

“Fak yea, bruv!! That was sick as!!”

“I can’t tell if you’re supposed to be British or Australian,” Panda commented.

Before I could weigh in on the matter, a screen appeared, as the last of the particles absorbed into Brock’s ‘body’.

Weaponlution — Level 1		
Kitchen Knife	Switchblade	Hydra
+4in Length	+2in Length	+1 Blade
+50% Weight	+Twin-edge	+80% Weight
	+30% Weight	

“It seems I only get a level from a kill I perform myself, regardless of how many kills my victim had.”

“Pick Kitchen Knife, I reckon.”

“The Hydra option seems goofy,” Panda said.

“I’m thinking Kitchen Knife is the best option here too,” I decided and tapped the screen.

As soon as I had selected, the vegetable knife in my hand grew a longer, more comfortable, handle and the blade not only widened, but also elongated. It felt much more like a weapon now, though it’d still chip if I tried to ram it into anything hard like bone or armor.

“I just realized: I’m pretty much screwed if I meet anyone with a similar transformation as Bee...”

“You still have your fists, numbskull.”

“Oh... right. I hadn’t thought about that. I guess that having abilities and passives is also really gonna give you a leg up on the competition.”

A series of *pops* sounded from down one of the snaking tunnels connected to the chamber, and I quickly ran in to chase down its source, hoping to score another kill quickly. After all, the longer I waited, the more evolved other Players’ weapons would be. And they had guns, so...

As I ran, an eyeball orb trailed after me, floating up by the ceilings.

I had, for a moment, forgotten why I was here and let myself become absorbed in the simple thrill of it all, but the sight of this eldritch camera drone reminded me that my existence here was just as entertainment. I’d get out of this fucked-up Game Show and kill the Announcer with my own bare hands. That was a promise I made to myself right then and there.