

Chapter -65

It was indeed a half-shark-half-human monstrosity. The top half was a whitish-grey shark head that was similar in girth to the front of a truck. It had beady black eyes, with skin covered in scars and battle-damage. The bottom half that the enormous head was supported on was just a human abdomen connected to a waist that sprouted two spindly and hairy legs wearing flipflops. It looked ridiculous.

But, to call it a Merman felt very incorrect, although that’s what Bee insisted that the System was calling it.

“Look!” she said, sharing the appraisal with me, while the giant was smashing its upper body into the ranks of enemies, crushing them and toppling the walls Bee had built.

Level 14	'Shark Merman'	Mini Boss ^x
<i>“*Shark noises*”</i>		
<i>This is just one of those unfortunate accidents that happens when the System gets to design stuff without oversight. Apparently the Aquarium Shop in the Serenity Park Mall had a juvenile Chinese High-Fin Banded Shark and though it can hardly be compared with big scary sharks, the System seems to think it’s close enough.</i>		
<i>Yes, it has taken some artistic liberties. No, we don’t understand why it looks like that.</i>		
<i>Also, in case you were wondering, the bottom half of this monstrosity is an Aquarium Shop employee named Miles.</i>		

“Isn’t it absurd!?” Bee complained. “The shark-half is clearly a Great White, not even close to a Chinese High-Fin!”

“I’ll go kill it,” I told her. I crawled onto the wall in front of us and began striding along the top of the gauntlet towards the boss. The furniture walls were sturdy but still wobbled under me with every step, as though reality was trying to reassert itself and point out that, no, a couple of bench cushions weren’t sturdy enough to hold up the weight of a grill and an air-conditioning unit.

Before I’d even made it halfway there, a ringing sounded in my inner ear, followed by a pop-up in front of my eyes.

Benefactor Quest
<p><i>This is a Quest given to you by your Benefactor.</i></p> <p><i>Failure to complete the Quest will result in a penalty of the Benefactor’s choosing.</i></p> <p><i>This is your Quest:</i></p> <p>Be a Good Boy and turn that Merman into a paste with your fist, while showering in its blood.</p> <p>Miranda</p>
Rewards: 25x ‘GAME Coins’ & ‘Small Benefactor Gift’

“This shit again...” I groaned, although the promise of a Benefactor Gift did make me somewhat excited. “*Unequip All.*”

SKILL TRIGGER!

BIRTHDAY_SUIT is now in full effect!

I_CAN_FLY is now available!

THE LOINCLOTH TRULY SUITS YOU.

PERHAPS I SHALL MAKE A DEMON OF YOU.

I shuddered at her voice, which sounded as though whispered over my shoulder and directly into my right ear. It was almost like I could feel a warm breath tickling my skin, but that was probably just imaginary.

“No thanks,” I muttered, “I’d like to stay human.”

“Why did you just take off your armor?” Samantha asked, before quickly adding, “And what the fuck are you wearing??”

“It’s for my Benefactor’s sake,” I replied, then hurried across the top of the walls to where my quarry was busy smashing its way towards the bathrooms and the Sphere that hid within.

With a leap off the top of the walls, I fell down upon the seven-foot-tall monster, driving my left fist into the nose of its enormous head.

The impact sent a double ripple down through the Mini Boss, slamming its human legs onto their knees, while I landed atop the pile of dead creatures and furniture rubble it’d been plowing its way through.

I shot forward with an uppercut into the bottom of the large shark head, the impact of which literally lifted it off the ground and sent it falling onto its back, where it crushed two imps that’d been trying to use the distraction to get on top of the walls. As the two imps popped like flesh balloons, some of their vile black blood got onto my skin. Suddenly, I felt like I’d taken a hit of some kind of potent upper.

My mind was flung back to the time when I’d been so deep in my psychosis that I’d been running away naked from the Castleburg Police after stabbing the Mayor with a screwdriver, his blood on my body. Although I couldn’t recall more than a few glimpses, I remembered that *feeling*. It was like lightning flowed through the veins of my body. That same feeling was hitting me now, and all because some blood had touched my bare skin.

“Woah, what the fuck was that?” I wondered.

“It’s your Loincloth,” Panda said. “It’s literally making you high off of showering in blood.”

“It’s kind of nice. I feel like I could take on that creepy bus, or even the metro!”

“How about you focus on the thing in front of you first?”

I pounced on top of the Shark Merman, which was struggling to get up, given the fact that it had no arms. As I landed on the human half, I began slamming my left hand down onto its shark head again-and-again.

Each impact hit twice and smacked it back down into the tiled mall floor, which was starting to crack. I kept hammering my fist down over-and-over, until blood started to spray out. As it hit me, the Battle Hardened status re-upped and felt like a reward, which only made me go even faster, until naught but grisly and flappy bits of flesh remained in the crater I’d created from dozens of repeated strikes.

I got up with a stumbling step, smoothing my hair back with a blood-slick balloon-gloved hand, then began cackling.

“...Ah, fuck,” Panda swore.

More monsters were still coming. I picked up bits of fragmented bone into my left palm, before shooting towards them with the increased speed of my BIRTHDAY_SUIT. With my elbow, I caved in the cranium of a skeleton, then flung one of the fragments at some closely-stacked imps, the improvised projectile tearing through them with such devastation that they literally came apart.

But the ranged attacks were unsatisfying. I needed to be close enough that I could bathe in the decimation I caused, so I let the remaining fragments fall from my hand, then surged towards the nearest monster, a skeleton wearing a t-shirt with a cartoon dog on it, which I pulverized with a punch.

Its bonedust showered me, but it wasn't the same as real blood, so I ignored the other nearby skeletons and instead went for the imps. They were coming out of a phone repair booth that apparently served as a Mini Dungeon.

I kept smashing them to bits and spraying their black blood onto my skin, fueling my thirst for more, while making my way to their Spawner. However, as I came to the booth, it seemed to have run dry. In frustration, I tore down the structure, then looked around for other monsters to hunt.

The Aquarium monsters had also seemingly run dry, but new creatures were coming up the escalators. They were knitted humanoids, which had the appearance of sweaters that'd grown legs and heads. It didn't matter what they were though, I flung myself at them before they could fully emerge out the top of the escalator landing.

Sometime later, I came to as a chime rang in my ears.

I shot upright, peeling myself off of the tiles on the mall's bottom floor, near to a hamburger restaurant that'd been trashed. Around me lay monsters of all manner of variations: vaguely-humanoid hamburger creatures the size of the average Disney Adult; oversized pests, like cockroaches, grasshoppers, and rats; human-fish hybrids; bear-sized teddy bears with fleshy innards; and even three of the Ambusher Mantids of the Anti-Rebellion Force. All of them had turned purple and were torn open and crushed, with my entire body sticky from their semi-dried blood covering every inch of skin.

The wisps of the creatures' Leftovers were all over the place, and there was a large coin hovering over my legs. A screen occupied half of my vision.

Benefactor Gift
<i>This is a gifted item from your Benefactor.</i>
<i>The following message was included with your Gift:</i>
What a performance. My investment in you has truly paid off. Be a Good Boy and put this on.
Miranda
Gift: <i>‘Fur Collar’</i>

A pink fur collar landed in my lap. I could already see where this was going.
“Fuck. No.”

Even though I had absolutely no intentions of putting it on, I inspected it.

‘Fur Collar’ x
<i>Made from the pink fur of a man-eating bat that lives in the domain of Duchess Miranda of Throbbing Excitement. It has been infused with her powers.</i>
<i>This collar is imbued with the following effects:</i>
<i>This item does not count as a piece of armor and cannot be unequipped unless Miranda allows it.</i>
<i>You are now the property of Miranda and must refer to her as ‘Mistress’.</i>

You transform into a Minor Lust Demon, increasing your Dexterity and Vitality by 25%, but take 100% extra damage from silver and gold weapons, as well as holy- and light-based attacks.

This is a Benefactor Gift and cannot be sold or discarded.

Weight: 0.2 Pandas

“Ugh.” I threw it in my inventory. It didn’t seem like a ‘minor’ Gift, which probably meant that Miranda had changed her mind.

“Brock has leveled 3 times!!”

“Damn, three times? How many enemies did I kill?”

Panda, who was spotless and opted to not sit on my shoulder for once, piped up from where he stood nearby, “You should head back to Bee. You can count the corpses on the way there.”

“It was scary,” Brock said. “I like blood-n-all, but not like that. Not like that at all.”

“I don’t even remember what happened,” I said.

“Well, there’s still about twenty minutes left before the Sphere Event is done.”

I blinked. I’d lost over an hour-and-a-half to the euphoria of bloodlust.

“Maybe I’ll stick to ranged attacks for a bit,” I said.

“Or just put your Carapace Suit on,” Panda suggested.

“Good call.”

I immediately equipped it through my inventory, then regretted it as soon as it manifested on my body. The soft and squishy interior was adhering to the sticky blood on my skin and bonding together in the most uncomfortable way imaginable.

As I began walking towards the escalators that’d been repainted red thanks to my rampage, I felt the inside of my Suit pull on my skin as though I was covered in one big band-aid and it was constantly being yanked at. On my way there, I collected all the Leftovers from my kills, but found only Game Coins.

I rode the escalator to the top and paused as I saw the piles of corpses.

“Holy shit.”

“You really went overboard,” Panda said.

While I rode the next one up to the third floor, I pulled open Brock’s inspection and began selecting the level-up options.

Brock — Level 3		
Pick one of the following level-up skills:		
Air Blast	Pitcher+	Static
Punching the air creates a powerful blast of condensed wind that has a max range of 12 yards.	All objects thrown or otherwise sent flying with Brock gain 4x speed and are very accurate.	Moving around while Brock is equipped builds up static that is released as electricity damage on the next punch.

I was still kind of in a haze, but my decision-making was fortunately unclouded by self-doubt. ‘Static’ sounded great for might one-punch-kill style, but I picked ‘Air Blast’ since it had a lot more utility and would fall off the list of options if I didn’t pick it now.

The next set of choices followed immediately behind it.

Brock — Level 4		
Pick one of the following level-up skills:		
Air Blast+	Static	Sonic Attack
Punching the air creates a devastating blast of condensed wind that has a max range of 18 yards.	Moving around while Brock is equipped builds up static that is released as electricity damage on the next punch.	Impacts produce a loud plastic shriek that inflicts temporary discombobulation on all creatures in a 20 yard radius.

This time I picked ‘Static’, as overcommitting to ‘Air Blast’ seemed a waste and ‘Sonic Attack’ was likely to hurt Bee, and didn’t outright state that it wouldn’t also affect me.

For the Level 5 options, it seemed it was mirroring the Weaponlution Event, as the choices had a greater impact on the weapon:

Brock — Level 5		
Pick one of the following level-up skills:		
Cursed	Pump It!	Ghastly
Brock now inflicts the Cursed status effect on impact, reducing the target’s Attributes by 15%.	A valve appears in the side of Brock that can be used to inflate the gauntlet using your own breath, increasing damage up to 400% for the next attack.	Turns all of Brock’s damage into Soul damage, which bypasses all physical barriers.

I immediately ruled out ‘Cursed’, since almost everything I hit died too quickly for it to be useful. I considered ‘Ghastly’ for a while, since it might be useful for enemies with lots of armour that might blunt the impact damage of my punches, but I settled on ‘Pump It!’ because it would allow me to prepare for one ultimate strike that, if coupled with `Punch.harder()`, could probably kill anything I’d ever encounter.

Brock changed shape and became more like a real gauntlet and less like a joke item, as he slimmed down and began look more like a hand than one of Mickey Mouse’s gloves. A small metal valve appeared by the wrist, just below the thumb.

He was wriggling excitedly on my hand, muttering about how good he felt.

“Holy crap, Gambit,” Panda muttered as he realized what I was now capable of, in terms of damage.

I grinned. “Killing the Mayor will be embarrassingly easy,” I predicted.