

If there was one thing that always brought back a wave of nostalgia for Dismal, it was the local arcade. The sounds and echoes of machines and games trying to grab her attention, the multicolored carpet that just *screamed* 90's, and the alluring smell of the snack bar in the corner. It was like a trip down memory lane. Though some of the games had been switched out over the years, they still kept the same layout, the same songs playing in the background, and the same nostalgic cups with the blue squiggly line that had been in use since they opened. It was like a home away from home, though admittedly one she had not been to in a while.

"Ah, the arcade," a voice said beside her. She turned to see their friend Jun right next to her with a small grin across his face. He brushed his long brown hair back as he looked around the entrance of the arcade. "A lovely place for an awesome day! Come on, birthday girl! Today, payment is on me!"

"Sasssssy," Dismal said as she followed her friend into the arcade to refill their credits. While Dismal was just fine with her birthday passing like any other day, Jun wasn't going to let that happen. After some back and forth, Jun had managed to convince Dismal and pull her back to their favorite arcade for the day. The two followed the path with minimal effort, having memorized it years ago, over to an old scanning machine. Jun pulled out his wallet and loaded his old card up with credits before holding his hand out to take Dismal's card.

"Ohp, hold on." Dismal fumbled around in her jacket pocket before pulling out her old card and handing it to Jun. After a quick few swipes and button presses, Jun handed back the worn card to Dismal with a grin.

"If you need a refill, it's on me! Do you wanna take the left side or right side first?" Jun said as he looked around, trying to spot anything new sitting in the prize corner. "I think they restocked recently, so let's get a ton of tickets."

Dismal hummed as she looked down the main walkway that split the arcade in half. "You take right and I'll take left. We'll meet back up in twenty to destroy some co-op games together."

"Hell yea, operation birthday bash is a go!" Jun exclaimed as they high fived before moving over towards their respective sides. While they both had their own favorite machines, there was one type of machine that Dismal ruled over like a queen: the claw machine. No plushie, item, or candy could ever escape the mechanical grasp of the claw whenever she was behind it. While there were no leaderboards for her to hold over Jun, as he did on some of the shooting games, she knew no one could hold a candle to her records. She walked down the rows of machines, towards the crane section of the arcade, each machine lined up in a corner of the building.

There weren't that many claw machines in the arcade, but she could tell you a story from each one of them. All of the machines had given her at least one of their prizes, which gave her confidence as she perused them. Maybe they had restocked one of them with an object worth focusing on. The first machine had a construction worker theme but held some rather lackluster prizes. It was more focused on electronics and watches, with black gravel beneath to give the

rather small amount of prizes inside some sort of background. The second machine had a school bus theme and was filled with the same cheap plushes as always. The third and the fourth were just basic machines; nothing about them stood out. Not even the mega crane with its jumbo plushes had anything good. Dismal gave a small frown as her attention turned towards the final cabinet.

Dismal was one never to be too superstitious but the final claw machine was always the odd one out. The theme was rather basic, if not just a little bit old. It always felt rather forgotten about, lying in the corner of the arcade. It was the one machine she had only gotten one thing from when she first visited the arcade so many years ago. Its contents occasionally changed out but any time she used it, nothing would ever come of it. Jun said it was probably rigged, a loose claw or too tight of a pack on the prizes. Still, Dismal could never shake trying it at least once, hoping for her luck to come up again. When she gazed into the machine to see what was in it, her eyes lit up.

Pokemon plushes. The machine was filled with them. A tiny promotional poster hung on the back window, as though it wasn't already filled with multiple different pokemon. Dismal pumped her fist before calming herself down. Of course, the one machine they added new pokemon stuff to was the one machine she could never fully tame.

"Well claw machine, today you will be conquered by the claw queen today and will give me my prize!"

She swiped her card with practiced ease as the lights and sounds of the machine came alive. She zoned those distractions out as she brought the claw over. With so many options, some would lose their target in the sea of plushies — but not Dismal. Some were nearly impossible to target due to them being too close to the glass or the back wall. Others were just too tightly packed together, with little hope of the claw threading the needle to pick one up. Her eyes scanned the middle, avoiding the edges and looking for a plush hanging out in a sweet spot. It was then she found her first target. A plush tepig sat aloof on top of a few other plushies, just begging to be picked up. It was odd that it was more placed there as a decoration and not incorporated, but Dismal didn't care. A basically free plushie was a basically free plushie. She moved the crane over to the perfect position. She took a deep breath and then held the tiny red button down.

The metal claw was lowered down with a cartoonish whistle coming from the machine. She held her breath as it inched closer and closer to her target. From experience, she knew it was a perfect shot. She had this in the bag. She-

The claw touched the tepig before freezing. It sat on top of the tepig, unmoving. The lights still flashed and danced, but it looked like the entire machine had failed.

"Great," Dismal said, letting loose a sigh. "Now what?"

As her hand reached back to the joystick, a tiny static shock jumped from the button and into her hand. She jumped back in surprise as she could feel the shock travel through all of her body. Her legs cramped up as she felt herself tilt backward. Flailing her arms desperately didn't help as she fell backwards. Dismal knew this was going to hurt. She winced, expecting the hard unforgiving floor of the arcade to greet her. Instead, her fall was greeted by a much softer cushion.

Dismal cracked her eyes open as she tried to hide the blinding lights around her. As her eyes adjusted, she let out a gasp of surprise. Large human-sized plushies surrounded her, large lights blinked all around her, a huge metal thing hung above them all, waiting in a corner. As she looked around, she froze in realization. She was in the claw machine. They weren't human sized, she was plush sized. Swearing, she reached for her phone but was unable to find it.

"What in the world happened?" She looked over to the left to see the tepig looking at her, staring into her soul, before rolling over and diving into the sea of plushies behind it. "Wait!" Dismal yelled as she reached forward, but was unable to grab onto it before it disappeared. Her mind raced as she desperately looked around for any means of escape. As she tried to stand up, her feet sunk into the plushies beneath her, causing her to wobble and fall onto her back.

She was stuck here. That thought alone caused her panic. Before she could think of something to help break her out, a tingling in her arm caught her attention. It had felt as if she had hit her funny bone, with her fingers and hands feeling like static. Looking down, Dismal saw her hands darken to a leaf green as her fingers shrunk together to form a tiny, useless hand. In a panic, she shook her hand, trying to get it off of her, but to no avail. As the green raced up to her elbow, it began to stiffen at the joint before being unable to move entirely.

"Get...it...off!" Dismal said as she tried to halt its advances. As it reached her shoulder, Dismal shivered as she could feel strands of something race down her back. Her jacket began to slowly fade from its original multicolored arcade pattern into a mix of green and cream plush fur. Dismal tried to pull off her jacket with her unaffected hand, only gripping at her soft belly. The jacket had seemingly fused with her as if she wasn't wearing a jacket at all. As she began to feel the stiffness crawl up her neck, she winced and held her breath.

As it raced over her chin, Dismal could feel it softly push itself back into her as her nose grew out to form a little snout. Her mouth tasted dry as it slowly sealed itself up. Panic rushed into her as her nose was fully covered, how would she be able to breathe? However, as Dismal waited, the need for a breath never came. Dismal opened her eyes but quickly tried to shut them as the wave of plush changes caught her eyes. She could feel them growing bigger and harder. As it washed over her hair, hiding it under a wave of green plush, Dismal tried to let out a sigh of relief, though she was unable to.

She couldn't get the best view of what was happening to her body at the moment but she could feel it. Her chest felt full as her left arm began to tingle, losing itself like her other arm. Next came her legs as they were rapidly pulled back into her body. When they were close enough,

the green began to wash over her legs and feet, leaving her with two tiny legs. As she could feel her body lean forward, She felt something heavy begin to grow behind her, stopping her from falling. She could feel a tail begin to slowly form behind her, three stiff leaves topping it off. As quickly as she had fallen into the machine, she had transformed into a small snivy plush.

Dismal tried to collect her thoughts and breaths, failing the latter due to being a plush. She had no way of moving, let alone turning or breathing. With a mighty roar in her thoughts, she pulled her arms forward trying to stand but only got a little wobble.

'Better than nothing I suppose,' she sighed. "Now, how in the hell am I supposed to get out of here?'

As if her thoughts were heard, a muffled voice came from behind the glass. She couldn't tell who it was at first, but a familiar face peered down at her. It was Jun! She must have missed the meet up time, and now he was looking for her. Perfect! However, since she had fully transformed, there was no way he could tell that she was a plush, let alone find her. Dismal tried to let out a scream to alert Jun of where she was, though nothing came out.

"Hmm, this is Dismal's usual stomping grounds. I'll just wait here. She's probably in the bathroom or something." As Jun waited, he decided to see if there was anything good in the claw machines. Most had nothing worth even trying to get, but he stopped at the last one with a gasp. Pokemon plushes topped with a snivy in the perfect position to grab. Jun gasped. "A snivy, Ooh! I should get that for Dismal, that would be an excellent present. She'll probably say I'm sassy but it's her birthday." With a smile, Jun swiped his card and the machine started up again.

The machine around Dismal came to life, the giant metal claw moving into its starting position before making its way above her. Dismal watched with anticipation as the claw began to lower, becoming bigger and bigger. As it got closer, Dismal wondered when it would stop. The claw slowly fell onto her and squished her down into the plushes below before tightening around her. Slowly, she began to be pulled up and gently twirled around. She could see the tepig off in the corner, watching her go, and then was met by Jun behind the glass, doing a little celebratory dance at capturing her. The claw came to a stop and dropped her. Dismal tried to let out a scream as she fell towards the bottom but just bounced harmlessly and slid to a stop.

'Whew, now that's over.' Dismal thought as the flap to the prize zone came up and bopped her on the nose. She let out a surprised eep as a large hand came in and picked her up. Jun looked huge as he inspected her plush body. "I can't wait to give this to Dismal! I bet she'll name you Arcade or something, it sounds like a cute name!"

Jun carefully stuffed the snivy plush into his jacket as Dismal unsuccessfully tried to get his attention. Maybe later when there were fewer distractions and noises she'd be able to reach him. For now, she was stuck along for the ride.