

## Chapter -3

I landed on my ass on top of the roof of the white-painted Calm Springs Asylum, which, apparently, had been my last known location before entering the asylum, which was now a dungeon full of monsters. At the time that the police officers and orderlies had pulled me down, I had been wearing my birthday suit and been in the midst of a pretty severe delusion that’d convinced me I could fly if I wasn’t wearing clothes, because obviously they’d get in the way of my invisible wings.

In hindsight, perhaps my internment within the emotionally-cold and awful asylum had been warranted, but no more!

“I’m free!!” I screamed, standing on the edge of the diminutive two-story building wherein I’d been trapped for over a year, perhaps more.

Pandamonium joined in with a “Wooooop!”, which I appreciated greatly.

Down below, three people were looking up at me like I was a madman, each of them armed with primitive weapons and wearing several layers of clothes in lieu of armor.

### **WORLD FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT!**

**Player ‘Gambit’ is the first person to clear a **Dungeon** in the **GREAT GAME!****

**For the next twenty-four hours, he is marked with a glowing beacon, so that anyone who wishes to congratulate him on his amazing rewards and riches can easily find him!  
He is currently located on top of the Calm Springs Asylum in the city of Castleburg, Massachusetts in the United States!**

**On an unrelated note, killing other Players gives you access to all their riches.**

“Ah... what the fuck...” I complained, after hearing the message and looking up to see a faint pillar of light above my head.

“This may come as a shock, but I think they’re trying to get you killed.”

“No shit, Sherlock. They told everyone I got a bunch of riches from the asylum, but I just got a meat flower and a box...”

“Hey you!” yelled one of the three people watching me from below. “Come down here! We wanna talk to you!”

Panda leaned forward to look at them from where he sat on my shoulder. “I don’t think they want to talk.”

I sighed, then looked down at myself and my clothes. I was utterly drenched in my own blood, as well as the black syrupy stuff that’d spattered on me from punching Dr. Juliens in his rose-shaped face.

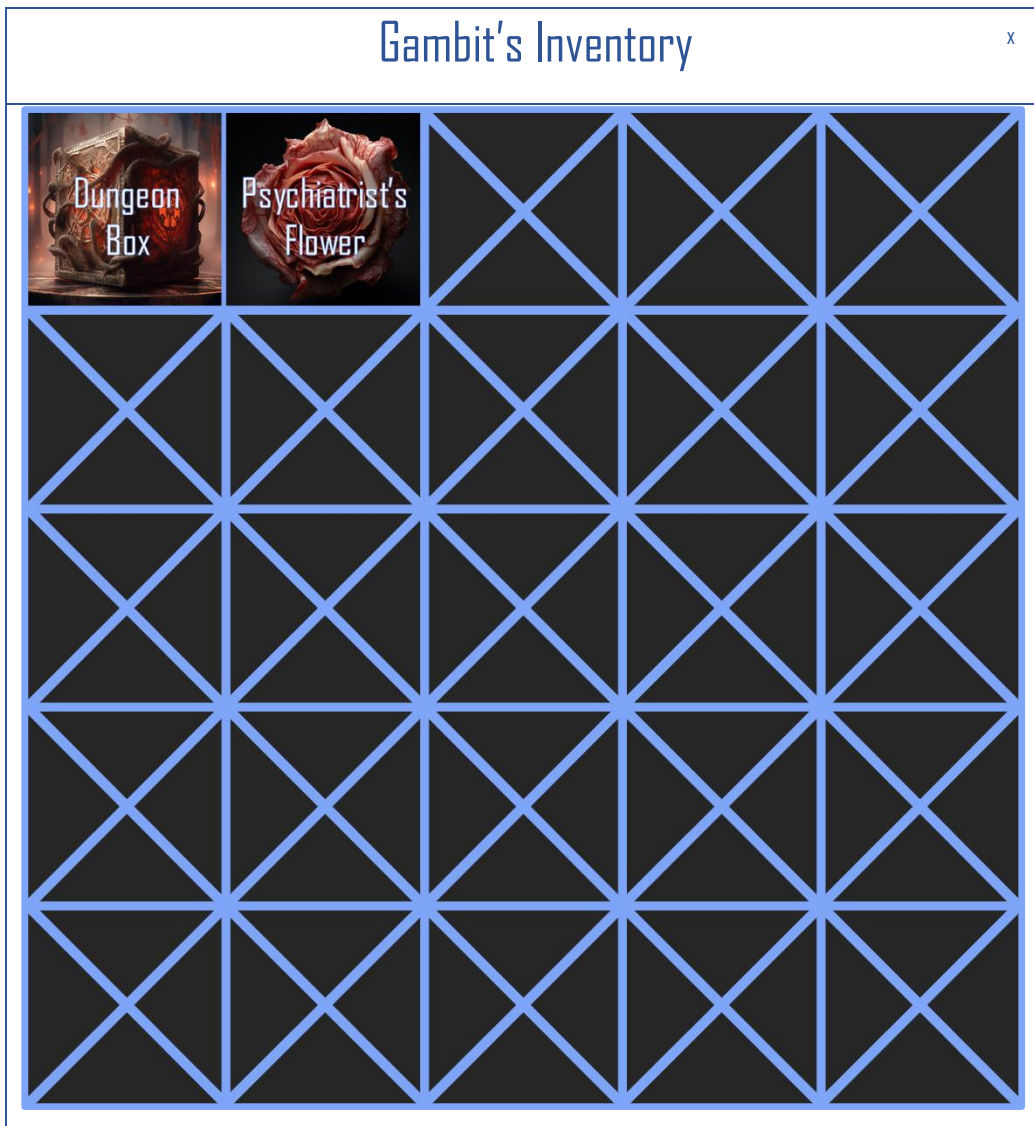
“Where the hell are my rewards??”

“Maybe you lost them when we were teleported?” Panda guessed.

“That’s bullshit!”

“Or maybe you have some sort of magical storage? That’d be cool!”

I thought about it, then said, “*Inventory.*”



**Total Inventory Weight: 2.3 Pandas**

“An inventory, huh?”

“It seems to be some kind of dimensional storage,” I said. While the three people on the street below were yelling their heads off at me, trying to find a ladder up onto the roof, I clicked the first item on the list.

<b>‘Dungeon Box’</b> <small>x</small>
<i>Who knows what’s within?</i>
<i>I definitely think you should open this <b>normal</b> box inside, and see the <b>normal</b> reward that it definitely contains, because it’s a <b>normal</b> box.</i>
<b>100% NORMAL REWARD BOX!!</b>
<b>Weight: 1.3 Pandas</b>

“I don’t think it’s a normal box,” Panda said.

“Are you enjoying playing Captain Obvious?” I asked. “I can’t tell if you’re being serious or genuinely don’t know.”

A tin can hit me square in the temple producing a hollow *bwoing* sound.

“What was *that* for!?” I yelled to the guy who’d thrown it at me. There were now four people down below.

“Get down from there and give us your shit!” he shouted.

“Hey, fuck you, buddy!” I yelled back, then, without really knowing how, brought the box into my hand and hurled it down at him, where he stood near the street-facing entrance of the asylum.

The Dungeon Box smacked him right in the forehead with enough force to knock him onto his back. It was apparently heavier than it looked. Considering how everything was weighed according to Pandamonium, as far as I could tell, it probably meant that the box weighed a little over a pound.

The three other people, all men, came to his side and helped him up, then gathered around the box.

“Why did you throw *that!*?” Panda scolded me. “That was your reward for being the first to do something! It was probably worth a fortune!”

“Whoops, I guess?”

One of the four men must’ve clicked the button on top of the box, because suddenly *something* started happening. Black mist like voluminous shadows boiled out of the ground around the four figures on the street below, then seven stitched-flesh arms emerged from the tiny wooden box between them and started grasping the literal air, pinching and pulling. Ominous teeth-gnashing and slobbering chewing sounds echoed from the small box between the four men, all of whom seemed frozen in place. Then, without warning, the seven arms all retracted back into the box, pulling the fabric of reality with them and creating a distorted ‘hole’ in the air.

Unsurprisingly, all four of the men were gone, sucked into the dimensional rift or whatever the hell it was that the box had summoned.

### **WARNING TO ALL CASTLEBURG PLAYERS!**

**Player ‘Arny Bob Jr.’ has activated a Dungeon Box and created a portal to the level 99**

**Dungeon ‘Fleshcrafter’s Abode’.**

**Don’t venture too close or you might be sucked in!**

**Or actually, please do, it’ll be fun to watch!**

“Still think it was a ‘normal’ box?” I asked.

“Don’t go near that, it’ll suck you in.”

“Does it look like I was planning on it??”

“Yes. Don’t forget you have self-destructive tendencies.”

“Well, thank god I’ve got such a *benevolent* angel as my guide!”

There was a beat of silence.

“...That was pretty rude,” Panda then said.

“Sorry.”

The doll patted me on my head. He was surprisingly easy to placate.

“Alright! Let’s have a look at that gross flower thing!”

“*Inventory*,” I said and the screen returned, now with just the one item inside the grid. I clicked on it and the tooltip appeared:

<b>‘Psychiatrist’s Flower’</b> <span style="float: right;">x</span>
<i>Harvested from the kind, loving, and gentle paragon of patient-care, Dr. Juliens, this flower allows you to gain one of the unique and transformative abilities from his repertoire.</i>
<i>But... you’ll have to eat it first.</i>
<b>Weight: 1 Panda</b>

“Ugh... why...”

“Gambit. Just eat the damn flower.”

I sighed and brought it out of my inventory and into my hand. It was so much bigger than I remembered: the size of a dinner plate and with several thick slabs of meat, aka. ‘petals’, making up its rose-like design. Also, it was raw.

I took my first bite and had to almost stop myself from puking.

“Don’t be such a sissy!” Panda said, adopting a ‘mean coach’ attitude. “I’ve seen you eat week-old sushi from a dumpster! *This* is nothing, you weak-willed cretin!”

I swallowed my first bite, then retorted, “Don’t forget I was in the hospital for a month because of the parasites *that sushi* gave me!”

“Excuses!” he shouted and slapped me with his soft fingerless arm across my cheek.

Rolling up another ‘petal’, I began adopting a strategy of shoving the meat down my throat without chewing, hoping I could swallow it without choking to death. I eventually sort of just left my body, as I went through the motions, my eyes locked on the distorted scar in the fabric of reality that awaited me down below on the street.

My mind reeled back into my own head again as a new window appeared before my eyes:

<b>Choose your reward!</b> <span style="float: right;">x</span>
<i>You actually ate the entire meat flower?? That’s pretty gnarly... well, anyway, here’s your reward... slob.</i>
<b>Pick one of the options:</b> <b>‘Math.multiply(Punch)’   ‘Psychiatrist’s Kiss’   ‘High-Five’</b>

I clicked on each in turn to see what they did:

**‘Math.multiply(Punch)’** x

*Passive*

*Multiplies your Punch with itself. How does that work? Who knows? We’re pretty sure this Passive isn’t even supposed to be available in our System, and yet here we are...*

**‘Psychiatrist’s Kiss’** x

*Ability*

*Briefly transform your face into a meat rose full of teeth and eyes, sort of like a twisted version of a clam’s face if you’ve been unfortunate enough to see what that looks like up-close.*

*Any Player who witnesses this transformation incur a +20% increase to their Insanity Gauge, and all non-boss enemies are inflicted heavy psychic damage.*

*That’s right, this ability has nothing to do with kissing.*

**‘High-Five’** x

*Ability*

*Perform a powerful overhead slap, which, if it hits another hand, produces a devastating shockwave out from the impact site.*

*Caution: do not use on your friends. When we say ‘devastating’, we mean it.*

I immediately picked the first one, since the other two seemed useless.

“Didn’t it say these were unique to Dr. Juliens?” Panda asked. “When have you ever seen him high-five someone?”

“Who cares, the logic behind this ‘great game’ is obviously bizarre and insane. I’m just wondering what my new Passive does.”

Before I could get off the roof of Calm Springs Asylum and test it, another window appeared in front of my face:

<b>Congratulations! You have unlocked an achievement!</b> <sup>x</sup>
<i>‘Picky’</i>
<b>You picked an option from a multiple-choice reward.</b>
<i>This is a token achievement that does nothing. That’s right, we even have those in the <b>GREAT GAME!</b></i>
<i>The reward is the annoyed expression you’re making right now, as you realize we made this just to annoy you.</i>

“Don’t forget to use your attribute points,” Panda said as I frustratedly waved the pop-up window away.

“This sucks... I feel like malware is being fed directly into my brain.”

“*Status*,” I grumbled and quickly invested my two points into Dexterity and Defense.

<b>Level -3</b>	<b>‘Gambit’</b>	<b><i>System Glitch</i></b> <sup>x</sup>	
<b>STATS</b>			
<b>Health:</b> Not ‘Bad’	<b>Stamina:</b> まあねー	<b>Armor:</b> Plastic Bottle Suit	
<b>Carry Weight:</b> 1000 Pandas	<b>Top Speed:</b> Carriage	<b>Mana:</b> Literally Zero	
<b>ATTRIBUTES</b>			
<b>Strength:</b> 2300 lbs.	<b>Dexterity:</b> Platypus	<b>Intelligence:</b> TBD	<b>Vitality:</b> Beef Medallion
<b>Athleticism:</b> 栗鼠	<b>Perception:</b> ‘Yes?’	<b>Wisdom:</b> N/A	<b>Defense:</b> Plastic Bottle
<b>ABILITIES</b>		<b>PASSIVES</b>	

'Punch.harder()'	' <i>Glitch</i> ' 'Insanity' 'Inanimate Voices' 'Math.multiply(Punch)'
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“I have no idea what Dexterity does. It doesn’t seem to change any of my stats.”

“Look on the bright side, at least you’re a platypus now.”

“Wombats are cooler, their shit comes out as cubes.”

“Platypuses produce both milk and eggs, meaning they could basically make their own pudding.”

“Also, is the Perception text changing color every time I view my status screen?”

“I think you’re just seeing things,” Panda replied. “Can we get off this roof now? I’m starving.”

“Why does the thought of you eating terrify me more than the literal hole in reality down there?”

“Is it because I don’t have a mouth?”

“Actually yes... how do you speak?”

Panda shook his head with a tsk-tsk sound.