

# MADMAN APOCALYPSE

## Chapter 0

Through the bars that covered the thick tempered glass window, the world was stained crimson, while fat droplets slowly rolled down the outside, leaving oily streaks in their wake.

I regarded the blood rain with an ambivalent look, although at least the sun’s light through the oily streaks dyed my white walls in a fascinating pink hue.

“Thursday already?” I wondered out loud to the only audience in my cell.

The Panda doll regarded me with its beady eyes ringed by black spots. No matter how many times the orderlies threw it out, for fear of it being utilized for nefarious means, it always found its way back to me. It was quite possible that the Panda wasn’t really there, but it was hard to tell.

“I’ve been here for too long,” I grumbled. They gave me no clocks or calendars or even pens with which to track the time here, so it was only by looking at the outside world through the tempered glass window and protective bars that I got a proper sense for its passing.

Thursday was always blood rain. It was the only real constant I could track the time by.

A *thump* from outside my soundproofed cell pulled my focus from the window to the door. Without warning klaxon or an orderly’s voice through the intercom buried in the ceiling where I couldn’t reach it, the door simply slid open. It was a heavy metallic thing that might as well’ve been used to secure a bull or a raging tiger. I smirked to myself at the thought that I was worthy of such security measures.

I shared a brief glance with the Panda doll, “I suppose you ought to come along.”

The knitted doll didn’t protest as I took it by the arm and went out through the door that had opened for some reason.

“Perhaps it is another hallucination, just like the blood rain?” I considered out loud.

When I looked down the clean white hall with the linoleum floor and bulbous security cameras dotting the ceiling at even intervals, I saw that this entire section had been unlocked, as my neighbors’ and their neighbors’ heavy metal doors were likewise opened wide.

There was not a single orderly in sight and the red glow that normally revealed the life within the cameras was absent as well.

“Is it Halloween already?” I wondered. “Or perhaps they are testing us.”

“You ought to run,” said a voice nearby.

I chuckled. “It’s been a while since I heard voices.”

I felt something tug on my right hand where I held the doll, then it began to pull on my long grey sleeve as it crawled up my arm. With a surprised look, I saw that the Panda had come to life.

“Well, *this* is new.”

The doll made its way onto my shoulder then poked me in the forehead with its knitted fingerless arm. “Snap out of it, Gambit! You have to get out of here before they get you!”

“Gambit? Is that my name?”

“Of course it is,” the doll replied, shaking its head in disbelief. “I’m Pandamonium, remember?”

“Not really.”

“They must have hit you hard in the head last time they restrained you, those orderlies.”

“They are pretty strong,” I agreed.

A fat hand suddenly reached out of my neighbor’s cell, it was covered in blisters and sores, with bruised hues of blues, blacks, and purples. A second later the head emerged.

“Mike looks different,” I commented, surprised at my neighbor’s glow-up. No sooner had the words left my mouth than the head turned to glare at me.

“...*that*’s not Mike.”

The head was elongated to twice its normal length, the eyes had sunken in so deep that nothing but darkness stared back, and the mouth was opened wide enough for the corners to reach the bottom of his shrunken ears. Not-Mike let out a garbled scream and launched out of the doorway, slamming into the hallway wall. He was about to reorient himself and jump me, when suddenly—

**\*Tap\* \*Tap\***

...

**Is *this thing* on?**

**Oh, it is?**

**\*Throat clearing noises\***

**Welcome one and all to the **GREAT GAME** (*trademark pending*)!**

**You may have already noticed that things have significantly changed around you.**

**Those of you who were using public transport at the time of the transformation may already be dead or are about to be, once time resumes. Especially those of you on the subway.**

And my condolences to those who were within public facilities when it happened, as you have now become mindless monsters.

The rest of you, however, are *mostly* all unscathed!

For now.

You will all be pleased to know that your world, “*Dirt*”, has been chosen to participate in the **GREAT GAME!**

“What does this mean?” you may wonder.

Well, let me tell you!

Once every odd-numbered millennium, a world with a sentient population is picked to take part in the **GREAT GAME**, with the winners gaining cosmic influence and popularity.

Pretty exciting, huh!?

I can tell a lot of you are thinking, “I don’t have time for this, I have work to do at the office!”

Well, *Samantha*, your office has become a den of monsters and your janitor is now an eight-eyed Calamity Demon, who craves human flesh.

But don’t you worry! Your old job and life may be gone forever to the predations of cosmic horrors and their filthy spawn, but the **GREAT GAME** comes with a fantastic System that makes everything A-OK by assigning you a cool new ‘Class’!

Your starter Class may or may not determine how long you survive, but for those of you who do manage to hold on to your *pathetic and meaningless* lives, you can potentially gain a new Class or evolve your current one down the line!

On top of your swanky System-granted Class is the ability to level up and improve your new attributes, like Strength, Dexterity, Wisdom, Defense, and more!

“How do I level up?” you ask. Well, it’s simple!

**Kill** your fellow humans or the many new *fun* monsters that roam your world!

For the next twenty-four hours, have as much *fun* as you want with your new powers and attributes. Don’t forget to familiarize yourself with the *wacky* neighbors who just moved into your area, and make sure to get comfortable with this new reality, because once the timer ends, the first of the many challengingly-brutal **GAMES** begin!

**Now a brief word from our Sponsors!**

**THE GREAT GAME IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY \*incoherent blood-curdling screams\*!**

Time resumed as though I hadn’t just heard a crazy message in my head that proclaimed the apocalypse had come in the form of some game of life-and-death. Then a screen popped up in front of my vision, before Not-Mike flew at me and slammed me back into my cell that I’d just emerged from.

I swiped at the air, trying to get the screen to disappear, while my neighbor tried to pound his fat hands against my chest. With a violent shove, I pushed myself out from under Not-Mike and his distended and bloated body. I kicked him in the side of his elongated face for good measure, then hopped over him and out the cell, before grabbing the heavy door and slamming it shut.

“That door weighs 800 pounds...” Pandamonium remarked.

I looked down at my hands, “Maybe all the exercise finally paid off?”

“What exercise? All you ever do is stare out the window!”

While Not-Mike pounded on the door from the other side, I finally regarded the screen that refused to leave my vision:

<b>Congratulations! You have unlocked an achievement! <sup>x</sup></b>
<i>‘Huh, that’s not meant to happen...’</i>
<b>Start the GREAT GAME inside a Monster Den.</b>
<i>I swear this is not meant to be possible... but you somehow survived being inside a Monster Den during the transformation. Unlike the other patients and orderlies within ‘Calm Springs Asylum’, you have retained your humanity.</i>
<i>Please remain where you are while we send an agent to investigate this mystery.</i>
<b>Reward: ‘System Glitch’ Class</b>

“What am I supposed to say? ‘Gotcha’? ‘Accept’?”

“Maybe there’s a small X in the corner that’s really hard to see?” the doll suggested.

I squinted as I looked at the screen floating inches from my face, then I spotted the small symbol in the top-right and tapped my finger against it, making it disappear.

“Huh... seems you were right.”

“Now can we get the hell out of here?” Panda asked. “It doesn’t sound promising that they’re sending an ‘agent’ to investigate why you are still human.”

As though to further emphasize the need for me to get a move on, garbled screams emerged from all the other cells nearby. Already, from the one furthest down the hall, a pencil-thin woman with clawed hands and a scrunched-up-yet-overly-long face was beginning to crawl out onto the ceiling, while her twelve-inch deep-purple tongue lolled around beneath her.

“I suppose waiting around is a bad idea,” I replied, then started running down the opposite way from where the thin woman had emerged. Screams and shouts came from the security station up ahead and I felt fairly confident that getting out of here would be quite a challenge.

I barged through the door that separated my ward from the security station, slapping it shut with such force that it snapped the round handle off. As I stood staring dumbfounded at the metallic handle in my hand, more of the patients emerged from their cells on the other side, some like Not-Mike and others like the creepy lady climbing on the ceiling, and all of them gunning it for me.

As I was about to spin around and hightail it for the exit, thick hands grabbed me around the waist and began squeezing.

“Pineapple!” I screamed, remembering my safe-word, but the person wasn’t letting up in the slightest. With as much power as I could manage, I rammed my right elbow behind me, hearing a devastating *crunch* as it connected, followed immediately with an angry roar. The grip on me lessened and I quickly pulled myself free, turning out to lock eyes with my attacker.

Except my attacker had no eyes. His entire head was like a thumb, nail and all, and the middle of it was caved-in from where my elbow had struck. He had the figure of a bodybuilder and wore the calming-blue suit of an orderly, though it was stretched so tight by his muscles that the seams looked on the point of bursting.

“The handle! Throw the handle at it!” Panda yelled.

I got to my feet and swung my fist with the round handle directly into his thumb-head, producing a loud *crunch* and ragdolling the disturbing monstrosity. No sooner had he collapsed to the floor than his twin emerged from behind the security counter, shoving aside monitors and an analog phone to get to me. I belatedly followed Panda’s advice and flung the metal handle at him, scoring a satisfying

hit that sent him tumbling head-over-backwards. I didn’t wait to see if he got back to his feet, but instead just booked it for the hallway that led to the main entrance.

My woolen socks and the lack of friction from the linoleum floor sent me skating, when I tried to stop myself from running into the next door. I hit it with an *oomph* as the air was punched from my lungs, then scrambled for the round handle.

As soon as I went through the doorway, I realized that something was off.

“The building’s changed!” I exclaimed, looking down a hallway that wasn’t supposed to be there.

“Everything has been transformed, after all,” Panda explained to no one’s benefit.

“How am I meant to get out? The entrance was supposed to be here!”

“Maybe you can punch your way through the wall?” Panda suggested jokingly, though I immediately took him up on the suggestion, ramming my fist into the plastic-textured off-white wallpaper.

After only a few punches, my knuckles were pissing blood, but I kept it up, until I’d broken off a big enough piece that I’d be able to climb through. However, when I peeled away the plastic wallpaper it was not freedom on the other side of the hole, nor even insulation or brickwork, instead it was like a tapestry of screaming faces. The sound it made was like TV static that only vaguely sounded like voices.

“Well, that’s mildly disconcerting,” the doll remarked.

“Mildly??”

“What happens if you touch it?”

“Do you just like goading me into doing stupid things!? Because I’ll do it!”

“I was just jok—” Panda started to say, before I reached out and touched the screaming tapestry. It looked as though it had been woven from old people’s hair, and for the brief moment I touched it with my fingers, it also felt like it. Then a powerful shock flowed through my body, before I was flung backwards into the opposite wall of the hallway and smoke billowed from my charred fingertips.

“Ow.”

“What the hell was that?”

**WARNING!**

**Attempts to exit a Dungeon in unconventional ways will be punished!**

**You have 0/1 Warnings remaining.**

**Next punishment will be fatal.**

“Well, I’ll be buggered,” Panda remarked. “Seems we’re in a ‘dungeon’.”

“That must mean there’s a boss or a gatekeeper somewhere.”

“Guess you’ll have to beat whoever runs this place before it’ll let you leave.”

“If this place now operates on game logic, aren’t I supposed to have abilities or something??”

“I don’t think you’re meant to start in a dungeon, to be fair.”

I got an idea, then lifted up my bleeding fist and snapped my fingers.

*Snap!*

My middle-finger immediately broke in half, the top-half bending over the back of the finger, so that the nail almost touched the first wrinkly joint.

“Ow!”

“What did you do *that* for!?” Panda scolded me.

“I was just trying to bring up a *Status* screen or something.”

No sooner had the words left my mouth than the System responded to my prompt and a window appeared in front of my eyes.

“What the fuck?”

## Chapter -1

<b>Level 0</b>	<b>'Gambit'</b>	<b><i>System Glitch</i></b> <sup>x</sup>	
<b>STATS</b>			
<b>Health:</b> Not Bad	<b>Stamina:</b> まあまあ	<b>Armor:</b> Tinfoil 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> Wombat	<b>Intelligence:</b> TBD	<b>Vitality:</b> Sirloin
<b>Athleticism:</b> 栗鼠	<b>Perception:</b> 'Yes?'	<b>Wisdom:</b> N/A	<b>Defense:</b> Tinfoil
<b>ABILITIES</b>		<b>PASSIVES</b>	
		'Glitch' 'Insanity' 'Inanimate Voices'	

I looked at the nonsensical information that'd appeared before my eyes. “This makes no sense whatsoever... also, what does it mean that my Intelligence is ‘TBD’, that’s just rude!”

“Hm, it looks to me as though this is the fault of your class, this *System Glitch*. All the information is jumbled.”

“I have three Passives at least,” I said, trying to look on the bright side. They were listed as ‘Glitch’, ‘Insanity’ which was a given, and ‘Inanimate Voices’.

“No abilities, huh?” Panda remarked. “Also, the only thing I can tell is that you can either carry a thousand copies of me at once or a thousand actual pandas.”

I looked at the Strength, which was the only other thing with a numerical value attached, though I wasn't sure what it referred to exactly. “Maybe Strength is how much I can bench press?”

“That'd put you far above the world champion,” Panda explained, somehow knowledgeable about the sport.

“Can you read those strange symbols?” I wondered.

“I think they're Japanese,” the doll said, “But no.”

“How fast do you think a Carriage goes?”



“No faster than thirteen miles per hour,” he replied with certainty.

“What do you think that *red bar* is for?” I wondered, tapping the display in front of my eyes.

As though prompted by my gesture, a new window popped up, overlaying the Status Screen.

<b>Congratulations! You have unlocked an achievement!</b> <sup>x</sup>
<i>‘Insane in the Membrane’</i> <b>Max out your <i>Insanity Gauge</i> at 100%.</b>
<i>Enjoy your new life of speaking in tongues and hugging your paralysis demons, while having the insects below your skin sing you soothing lullabies when it rains upside-down.</i>
<i>Normally, reaching 100% on your <i>Insanity Gauge</i> is supposed to turn you into a mindless monstrosity and remove you as a contestant in the <i>GREAT GAME</i>, but you are somehow still human-ish in appearance. How peculiar.</i>
<i>Please remain where you are while we send another agent to investigate this mystery.</i>
<b>Reward: ‘<i>Insanity</i>’ Passive</b>

“How many agents are they gonna send to investigate me?”

“A lot, from the sounds of it. Seems like you weren’t supposed to survive going completely insane.”

“It’s kind of their fault for expecting people in an asylum to succumb to their insanity.”

“Seemed to work on your friends,” Panda remarked darkly.

“Posers,” I scoffed.

Before I could close the Achievement screen, another window popped up, overlaying it. It was starting to feel like I’d ‘accidentally’ visited the wrong kind of website or something...

<b>Congratulations! You have levelled up!</b> <sup>x</sup>
<b>You have reached Level -1!</b> +1 new Attribute Point available to invest!

<i>Kills required for Level -2</i>	<i>0/5</i>
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“Why is it counting my levels backwards?”

“How am I supposed to know how this works?”

I clicked away the Level Up and Achievement windows, but yet another Achievement popped up immediately after:

<b>Congratulations! You have unlocked an achievement!</b> ✕
<i>‘¿Level Up?’</i>
<b>Reached Level -1</b>
<i>I’m not sure what’s happening here to be honest, but, eh... best you probably just remain where you are while we send a squad of agents to investigate this mystery.</i>
<b>Reward:</b> <i>‘Punch.harder( )’</i> Ability

“Ugh, it’s non-stop!” I complained.

“You got an Ability though,” Panda remarked.

“I didn’t even get to pick it!”

“Don’t be a choosing beggar,” he scolded me.

I clicked the X to close the pop-up, then took in my Status again and poked the Intelligence attribute, to, hopefully, invest my available point.

**ERROR!**

**Unable to invest point in chosen attribute!**

**Please pick another.**

I poked the Wisdom attribute, only to be met with the same message.

**ERROR!**

**Unable to invest point in chosen attribute!**

**Please pick another.**

“Ugh,” I groaned. “Why isn’t it working?”

I poked the Vitality attribute and this time *something* happened. I sighed as I saw what it changed into. Interestingly, the Health stat changed alongside it, but, again, the result was dumb.

Level -1		‘Gambit’		<i>System Glitch</i> <sup>x</sup>	
<b>STATS</b>					
Health: Not ‘Bad’		Stamina: まあねー		Armor: Tinfoil Suit	
Carry Weight: 1000 Pandas		Top Speed: Carriage		Mana: Literally Zero	
<b>ATTRIBUTES</b>					
Strength: 2300 lbs.		Dexterity: Wombat	Intelligence: TBD	Vitality: Beef Medallion	
Athleticism: 栗鼠		Perception: ‘Yes?’	Wisdom: N/A	Defense: Tinfoil	
<b>ABILITIES</b>			<b>PASSIVES</b>		
‘Punch.harder( )’			‘ <i>Glitch</i> ’ ‘Insanity’ ‘Inanimate Voices’		

“This isn’t so much insane as it’s just downright frustrating.”

“I wonder why the ‘bad’ part of your Health stat is in quotations now, but I guess we can at least say that your Vitality is based on types of meat dishes.”

“I’m not sure there’s any logic behind this...”

I clicked the Status window away and got to my feet. “Alright, enough of this. I’m gonna find a way to get out of here,” I decided. My right fist was still bleeding, though scabs had already formed. Panda, who had crawled down to sit in my lap, quickly climbed up the legs of my pajama’s pants, then up my back and up onto my shoulder.

“What do you think your ability does?” he wondered.

“Doesn’t seem that hard to figure out,” I replied, as I made my way down the hallway, trying not to look too closely at the screaming tapestry of faces through the hole I’d made. The warbling screams from the patients behind me was entirely gone. Only the sounds of the wailing hole in the dungeon

wall and the hum of the lights in the ceiling accompanied me, as I followed the path that seemed to curl around, before another door was in my way.

As soon as I pushed open the door, a long-limbed woman in a pajama set like mine leapt into me, sending me back out into the hallway, where my head bounced off the rubbery linoleum floor. I pushed the screaming figure off me, before she could sink her buck teeth into my face or stab me with her Edward-Scissorhands-looking fingers.

I scrambled backwards on my ass, while trying to get back up, though the lack of friction from my woolen socks made it a difficult maneuver. The woman swung for me with her scissor fingers and nicked my shins, before I was able to pull my legs out of the way.

Finally, I got back to my feet, just in time for her to swipe at my face, cutting me shallowly across the bridge of my nose.

“You motherfucker,” I cursed.

“Wouldn’t it be fatherfucker?” Panda corrected unhelpfully.

I pulled my bleeding fist back then hit her with a haymaker, right in the forehead. The punch produced a loud *slap* that echoed through the hallway and sent her slamming back into the floor with such force that it splattered the back of her head on impact.

It was clear she wasn’t getting back up.

“You’re already bleeding quite a lot,” Panda remarked.

“It’s fine,” I said, stepping over the dead patient.

When I returned to the door, I opened it cautiously and peered inside the waiting room that greeted me. There weren’t any of the ripoff Spy Kids thumb-faced orderlies in sight, but two more of the twisted patients were seated in plastic chairs up against the wall in the back, and there was a potted plant that’d clearly come to life next to them. The normally-calming picture-frames on the walls were full of grisly torture scenes and leaked actual blood down the off-white plastic walls, and a set of reinforced metallic doors stood against the wall on my right, though there was no obvious way to open them.

“Charming,” Panda remarked.

I double-checked to be sure, but it was clear that it was just those two enemies in the room. Then I made a quick decision, and pulled the round handle off the door, before running towards the two monsters. I settled into a slide across the floor on my socks as I wound back my arm and flung the metal knob right into the chest of one of the two, a man, perhaps, crushing his sternum with the impact.

It produced a sound like crackers being stomped on. The other got up with a warbling scream, seconds before I slammed my palm into its chin with enough force to snap its spine.

As the distended and twisted patient collapsed to the floor, I finished off the other, which was gasping for air, with a downward punch that cracked its head against the floor.

“Yeah, I’ve definitely gotten stronger,” I said as I tried to wipe my bloodied fist on my grey shirt.

The intercom in the ceiling suddenly buzzed to life with a scream of TV static.

[*THE PSYCHIATRIST WILL NOW SEE YOU!*] it yelled.

The reinforced doors in front of me swung open.

## Chapter -2

The pitter-patter of my blood falling in fat droplets from my fist to the linoleum floor filled the waiting room, as I peered into the darkness that awaited me past the opened metal doors. It was impossible to see what lay ahead, but it was fairly clear that *something* was awaiting me within.

Panda was rubbing his chin, which was a strange mannerism for a doll to exhibit. “I wonder what kind of Psychiatrist we’re dealing with?”

I thought back to the man who had often interviewed and assessed me during my long stay at Calm Springs Asylum. “Maybe it’s Dr. Juliens.”

“Think he’ll force you to swallow pills again?” Panda guessed.

I frowned at the memory, though, to be precise, *he* had always just decided what medicine I would take, while the orderlies had been the ones enforcing my medication regimen. I’d quickly learnt to spit out the pills after they’d left though; there was no way I trusted them after seeing how they reduced the other patients to feeble placid creatures.

“Do you think I avoided becoming like the others here because I didn’t take those pills?”

Panda shrugged.

“If it is Dr. Juliens, then I’d like to bash his head in,” I remarked.

“Wasn’t he just doing his job?”

“He said I was clinically insane!”

Panda fixed me with a stare. “You do know you’re talking to a doll, right? Also, even the System said you’re insane.”

“Shut up...”

I clenched my fist, ignoring the pain from my broken middle finger, then walked through the open doorway.

The darkness was like a veil or thin membrane that allowed me to cross the threshold of the double doors, but it immediately became solid once I’d gone all the way through, as though only allowing one-way traversal. I touched it after passing through and it was like a pane of glass, though seemed impossibly-dense when I knocked on it.

“Welcome to my office!” announced a voice from behind me.

I turned away from the threshold membrane to take in the scene before me. It was the same plastic off-white walls as the hallways and waiting room, the same linoleum floor, and similar plastic furniture. As with the waiting room, the normally-calming pictures were all totally messed up, all of

them showing skinned humans that were smiling and tracking me with their eyes, while their blood ran out of the frame and down the walls.

Behind a white desk with nothing but a cup of coffee on it, stood the Psychiatrist. He wore a calming-blue woolen cardigan and dark-grey trousers. His straw-blond hair was swept back with copious amounts of hair-gel and he had round spectacles that rested on his nose, giving him a strange aura somewhere between party-boy and professor.

“It’s been a while [REDACTED],” he said by way of greeting.

“You look and seem relatively-normal, Doctor.”

Dr. Juliens pushed his glasses further up his nose ridge, then grinned. “I am afforded a bit more sentience given the role the System granted me. I *am* the boss around here after all.”

Panda tugged me on the ear, then whispered, “Was he actually the boss of this place?”

“No,” I replied, my eyes locked on the Psychiatrist.

“I suppose this is the part where I kill you then,” Dr. Juliens started and the entire room unfurled, while the furniture flattened into the floor. It was as if we had been inside a box and the walls fell away to reveal a hidden exterior world. But it wasn’t the outside world, no, instead it was that same screaming tapestry of faces woven from hair, which extended out from the edges of the floor and up over us like a dome.

I reminded myself that touching it was a bad idea.

“This ought to be the part where the evil Doctor starts laughing maniacally,” Panda predicted, and no sooner had he said it than Dr. Juliens began cackling to himself, while his body underwent an insane transformation.

His arms and legs elongated, with his fingers growing long hook-nails, while his feet transformed into hooves and the knee-joints inverted. His face transformed as well, but not how I’d expected. From the nose, a swirl formed on his face, moving around in a spiral until it reached his ears, before his entire head unfurled like a meat rose, with the petals all adorned with spherical blue eyes, each featuring a tiny black dot.

The cackling transformed into distorted TV static, while his body continued to grow.

“We might be fucked,” Panda said, but I ignored him, while backing away towards the entrance, which, like all the other walls, had disappeared and now just led to a brief fall cushioned by the screaming tapestry that marked the boundary of the arena.

With a sudden lunge, Dr. Juliens flung his arms out towards me, the long limbs having grown a second elbow joint, while the laughter continued emanating from his meat-rose face with all the blue eyes staring intently at me.

I hopped out of the way of his hook-nails, which caught on the linoleum floor and tore deep gouges as the enlarged hands pulled back.

[*THIS TREATMENT MAY HURT A LITTLE!*] the staticky intercom voice said, before he swung his arms for me again. I took the opportunity to get in closer to his body by ducking under his arms, then jumped from the floor and up into the air, winding my arm back for a sucker-punch.

[*IT SEEMS MY TREATMENT WAS TOO LENIENT!*] the intercom roared, as though Dr. Juliens was about to activate some sort of special power, however, before he had the opportunity, I swung my fist and rammed it straight into the center of his rose face.

A loud distorted grunt emerged from the transformed Doctor, who, to my surprise, started falling backwards, while his hook-nails once again tore deep furrows in the floor. As I fell back down from my incredible jump, Dr. Juliens landed on his back, his elongated limbs momentarily out of commission. My woolen socks hit the floor and I slipped from the lack of friction, giving him just enough time to sit up, before I could get in close.

“Punch him harder!” Panda yelled excitedly, baying for the Psychiatrist’s blood.

I leapt from the ground again, easily clearing two meters without much effort, then swung my fist at the same spot on his face, but this time yelled the name of my ability: “*Punch.harder()*!”

ACTIVATING SCRIPT: *Punch.harder()*!

```
if(Punch != Kill){  
  Punch.harder();  
}
```

My punch connected with Dr. Juliens’ face, emitting a loud *smack*, but while it clearly rocked his world, it wasn’t enough to kill him. As though realizing this, the condition of my strange ability triggered:

REACTIVATING SCRIPT: *Punch.harder()*!

```
if(Punch != Kill){  
  Punch.harder();  
}
```

As though there was a machine in my arm that moved at superhuman speed, my fist pulled back and released forward into a punch with such velocity that the sound of the first *smack* was still echoing



as the second one came. I could feel that there was more oomph behind this follow-up hit, but, once again, the ability was not satisfied:

**REACTIVATING SCRIPT: `Punch.harder()`!**

```
if(Punch != Kill){  
    Punch.harder();  
}
```

Another instant punch followed, even harder than the previous two combined. But it wasn't enough.

The ability reactivated, punching much harder, producing a loud *crunch* from the sounds of all my fingers breaking in unison, even my middle one which was already broken.

But it still wasn't enough.

There followed a near-instantaneous sequence of: punch => reactivation => punch => reactivation for the next eighteen punches, wherein my fist and arm were damaged nearly as much as the Doctor's meat-rose face.

After the eighteenth punch in the last 1.2873 seconds, the skin and meat on my right fist was ground down to the bone and there was not a single bit left unbroken in my hand and wrist, with the tendons and muscles totally frayed and torn as well.

I fell away from the final impact, which released a powerful buffet of wind that sent me careening back towards the far edge of the floor, while the smoking pulped-to-oblivion remnants of the monstrous Psychiatrist's head collapsed back the other way, spilling syrupy black blood onto the floor from his neck.

As I slid on the ass of my pajamas towards the edge where the tapestry of faces awaited me below, a celebratory chime played through the air and the walls reappeared just in time to halt me from certain death.

## **DUNGEON 'Calm Springs Asylum' CLEARED!**

**Recommended Player level: 20**

**Average Player level: -1**

**Player survivors: 1**

**Player deaths: 0**

**Enemies slain: 5**

**Bosses slain: 1**

“I did it...” I remarked, woozy from the pain in my right hand and the comedown of the adrenaline leaving my bloodstream. Before I could look down at my ruined hand in my lap and see how bad it was, the tendons, muscles, sinew, meat, bones, and skin all began reforming and repairing itself. A series of *pops*, corrective *cracks*, and tearing Velcro, for some reason, emitted from my limp, before it was as pristine as ever.

I looked at my hand in wonder, then suddenly realized Pandamonium was missing from my shoulder. Fear and despair flooded my mind as I considered that he might’ve been blown off the side of the arena, but I didn’t have the chance to look for him as several windows appeared in front of my eyes, blocking my sight.

<b>Congratulations! You have unlocked an achievement!</b> <sup>↗</sup>
<i>‘Dungeon Delver’s First Time’</i> <b>Kill your first <b>Dungeon Boss</b>.</b>
<i>No matter how many bosses you end up slaying during your participation in the <b>GREAT GAME</b>, you’ll always remember your first. It hurt and it was confusing, but you also realized you liked it.</i>
<i>Your reward is thematic to the dungeon ‘Calm Springs Asylum’ and may aid you in some way. Or maybe it’ll curse you. It’s just a risk you’ll have to take!</i>
<b>Rewards:</b> Full Recovery & ‘Psychiatrist’s Flower’

<b>Congratulations! You have unlocked an achievement!</b> <sup>↗</sup>
<i>‘World First Dungeon Defeater’</i> <b>Be the first to clear a <b>Dungeon</b> in the <b>GREAT GAME</b>.</b>
<i>It has only been...</i> <i>*checks watch*</i> <i>...like an hour since the <b>GREAT GAME</b> started, and here you are, already beating a level 20 dungeon all by yourself!?</i>

*You are definitely one to watch, it would seem, and, as a result, you deserve a fitting reward! Just don't, y'know, open it indoors...*

**Reward:** ‘Dungeon Box’

<b>Congratulations! You have levelled up!</b> <sup>x</sup>	
<b>You have reached Level -3!</b>	
+2 new Attribute Point available to invest!	
<i>Kills required for Level -4</i>	<i>3/15</i>

I clicked all the windows away and scanned the room for Panda, just as a meat rose the size of a dinner plate fell into my lap, alongside a strange wooden puzzle box with a button on top of it.

**WARNING!**

**The Dungeon will close in 60 seconds!**

**You will be returned to your last known location outside the Dungeon perimeter!**

“Pandamonium!” I yelled. “Where are you!?”

I pushed myself to my feet and heard a gasp from under where I’d been sitting.

“...I can breathe!” exclaimed Panda in terror and relief. “Oh my god, I saw my family, waving at me from the clouds! Grandpapa was there, calling my name!”

I realized I hadn’t slid on the ass of my pajamas, but rather on top of Panda’s body... Stooping low, I lifted him from the floor, dusted off his ‘fur’, and settled him on my shoulder.

“That last one was one hell of a punch,” he remarked, already over having been sat on.

“Should’ve seen what it did to my hand though...”

“Your hand looks fine?”

“I was healed as a reward for killing the boss it seems.”

“Oh. Well, just don’t go punching things willy-nilly with that ability. It seems like it has the potential to create an infinite loop if it’s something you can’t ‘kill’. Like a wall. I mean, how do you kill a wall?”

“Good point.”

—Patreon-exclusive Copy—  
—Kristoffer Pauly (aka “Dosei”)—

“What’s that gross flower about?” Panda asked, looking down at my feet, where the meat-rose and ‘Dungeon Box’ rested against my socks.

**DUNGEON CLOSING!**

**Returning you to your last known location outside the dungeon perimeter!**