

DUNGEON CRAWLER CARL BOOK II

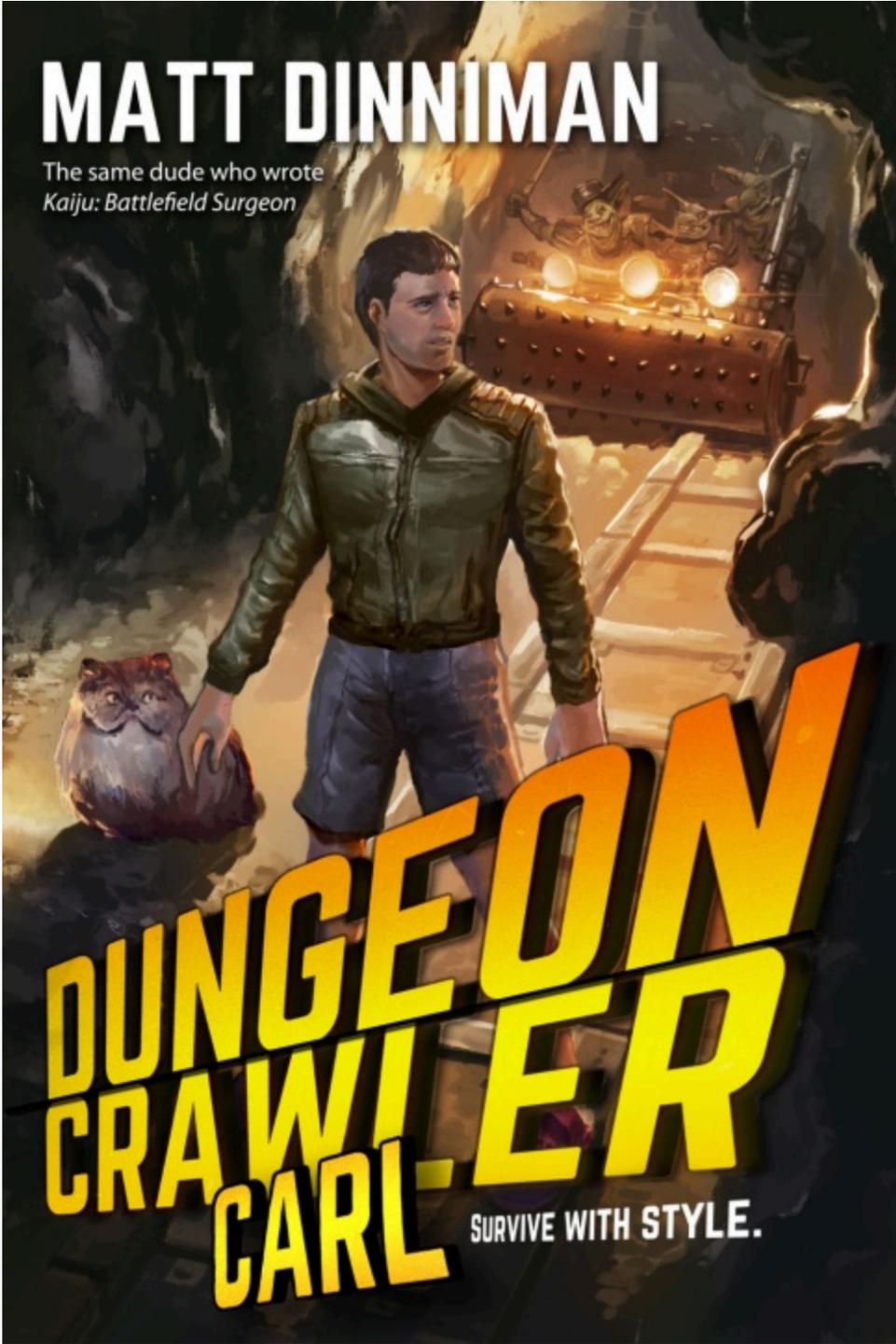


**CARL'S
DOOMSDAY
SCENARIO**

MATT DINKELMAN

MATT DINNIMAN

The same dude who wrote
Kaiju: Battlefield Surgeon

A man in a green jacket and blue shorts stands in a dark, industrial setting, holding a small owl. In the background, a large, mechanical structure with lights is visible. The scene is lit with a warm, orange glow.

DUNGEON CRAWLER CARL

SURVIVE WITH STYLE.

Dungeon Crawler Carl Book 2: Carl's Domsday Scenario **(Ch 5-65) by DoctorHepa**

Category: Original

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Summary:

Dungeon Crawler Carl Book 1 is now on Amazon!

mybook.to/dungeoncrawlercarl

Royal Road and Patreon is where to get the newest chapters and releases.

The apocalypse *will* be televised!

A man. His ex-girlfriend's cat. A sadistic game show unlike anything in the universe: a dungeon crawl where survival depends on killing your prey in the most entertaining way possible.

In a flash, every human-erected construction on Earth—from Buckingham Palace to the tiniest of sheds—collapses in a heap, sinking into the ground.

The buildings and all the people inside have all been atomized and transformed into the dungeon: an 18-level labyrinth filled with traps, monsters, and loot. A dungeon so enormous, it circles the entire globe.

Only a few dare venture inside. But once you're in, you can't get out. And what's worse, each level has a time limit. You have but days to find a staircase to the next level down, or it's game over. In this game, it's not about your strength or your dexterity. It's about your followers, your views. Your clout. It's about building an audience and killing those goblins with style.

You can't just survive here. You gotta survive big.

You gotta fight with vigor, with excitement. You gotta make them stand up and cheer. And if you do have that "it" factor, you may just find yourself with a following. That's the only way to truly survive in this game—with the help of the loot boxes dropped upon you by the generous benefactors watching from across the galaxy.

They call it *Dungeon Crawler World*. But for Carl, it's anything but a game.

DCC [Discord!](#)

10/01/20

The first several chapters of DCC are now off of Royal Road because the book is on [Amazon](#). I want to thank all of you for 9 months of amazing support. This is and Patreon will always be the place for the newest chapters and content, but to comply with Amazon's Kindle Unlimited policy, I can't have more than 10% of the story up here.

This is a work in progress. Major editing will be done after the book is complete, so there *will* be egregious typos and parts that make no sense whatsoever. Please, please feel free to point any and all of these things out. Chapters WILL get edited, and that editing might break earlier chapters. I will attempt to keep readers apprised of all changes. Updates one-two days a week.

Start Here for Book 2. Chapter 48 - Carl's Doomsday Scenario

A note from DoctorHepa

Welcome to Dungeon Crawler Carl, Book 2: Carl's Doomsday Scenario!

Book 1 (which is part 1 and 2) is currently for sale on Amazon over [here](#).

Book 2: Carl's Doomsday Scenario

“You do realize that thing is going to get you killed, right?” Odette asked after the conclusion of her show. Donut was currently chasing Mongo around the studio. The little dinosaur kept running head-first into the invisible wall and screaming. Lexis, Odette’s production assistant, had given the small monster a bow tie to wear on the show, and he’d practically bitten off her finger. The tie lasted about three seconds before he’d ripped it off.

The taping had gone well. We started off by discussing the whole thing with the rage elemental. Then we talked about Mongo. Donut had trained him to stand quietly on her shoulder, and he’d mostly behaved himself. Mostly. Odette mentioned something about a magical pet carrier, which apparently was the dungeon’s equivalent of a pokeball. They were supposedly expensive, but it allowed us to put bonded pets into inventory without harming them. I didn’t care how much they cost. If we could afford it, it was going to be one of our first purchases. No more shoving Mongo into the gerbil cage and then sticking him in the bathroom so we couldn’t hear his shrieks while we slept.

I knew what was coming next.

After the segment on Mongo, I finally got to see a shortened version of the infamous Pork Boy Snick. Donut thought it was hilarious. The mysterious creator of the video had been very... generous... with my proportions. I’d been half-expecting the video to feature my feet prominently. I didn’t dare say it out loud, but I had this strange notion that the system AI might’ve had

something to do with the video. But if it did, the video showed nothing to indicate it. In fact, it had clearly been produced by someone more interested in the Maestro than me, as he was the obvious subject of the video.

“So,” Odette had said after we watched the scene and the audience’s uproarious laughter eased. “You are likely unaware of this, but *Death Watch Extreme Dungeon Mayhem* announced earlier that it was going into hiatus while the show restructured.”

“I’m shocked,” Donut said. “Quite shocked.”

The audience laughed.

“King Rust of the Skull Empire, who recently arrived in earth orbit, has been oddly quiet about the controversy. A spokesperson for the royal family has requested people stop referring to the prince as ‘Carl’s Naughty Little Piggie,’” The audience roared, “But so far, nobody seems to be complying.” Odette turned to her audience. With her bug helmet, her face was expressionless, but I could hear the grin in her voice. “I would personally like to assure King Rust that I would never call Prince Maestro ‘Carl’s Naughty Little Piggie’ or ‘Pork Boy.’ And I would like to encourage my audience to never sink to that level. Again, it’s ‘Prince Maestro’ and not,” she held her hands out.

“Carl’s Naughty Little Piggie!” the audience shouted, followed by peals of laughter.

“Anyway,” Odette said. “What do you think about this, Carl?”

“Look,” I said. “I don’t know anything about the Skull Clan or Empire or whatever, or this King guy. I’m sure he has a perfectly nice family and kingdom.” The audience laughed. “I don’t want any trouble with him and his people. But his son is a dick, and I called him out on it. Nothing more, and nothing less. I didn’t mean to cause an intergalactic incident. I know nothing about the video.”

“So, to be clear, it is a snick,” Odette asked. “A lot of people seem to believe it’s real.”

“If I was going to turn gay, it wouldn’t be with that guy.”

The audience screamed. Odette nodded. “But you did challenge him to single combat.”

“Yes, I did. And that offer still stands,” I said. “I still don’t know how any of this stuff works because you guys won’t tell me anything.” More laughter. “But I hope for the chance to face him one on one.”

“We do too, don’t we?” Odette said.

The audience cheered. Someone shouted, “Glurp, glurp!” A minute later the whole audience was glurping.

Odette shook her head in mock disgust.

The show soon ended after that. Like last time, Odette ushered Lexis out of the room so we could talk for a few minutes.

“Is it worth it,” I asked, indicating the pet. “If he lives, I mean.”

“You should’ve picked the Tummy Acher,” Odette said. “The little round guy with the mohawk. They’re very friendly and easy to work with. Plus they’re rare, and people love them. Once they’re full-grown, they are one of the best melee tanks in the game. But your Mongo is a solid choice. If you can keep him alive, he will be a vicious fighter.”

“So,” I said. “I gave your message to Mordecai. He wasn’t too pleased with the idea of working for you.”

She nodded sadly. “I saw. I watched you tell him. He had a few additional choice words for me after you left. He’ll come around. Tell him I understand his feelings on the matter, and I would love for the opportunity to explain myself.”

“What happened between you two?” I asked.

“We don’t have time to go into it,” Odette said. “But the short answer is I pushed him too hard, and he paid dearly for it. Anyway, you’re about to hit

the all-important third floor.” She’d asked me on air if I knew what I was going to do, and I’d answered truthfully. I had no idea what was going to happen. Donut had lied and said she had it all planned out. “Do you really not know what you’re going to do?”

“I don’t even know what my choices are going to be,” I said. “How can I decide?”

She nodded. “When I decided to stay human, it lost me several viewers, but not too many. You’re in a tough position. Whatever you choose, make sure it has either a pathfinder skill or some sort of advanced mapping ability. Finding stairwells as quickly as possible will be crucial on further floors. It’s not going to be a problem on this third floor. Also,” she added. “Make sure Donut goes first. That way you can tailor your class selection on hers. I would ignore the AI’s advice for your race, but I’d take a careful look at whatever it suggests for your class.”

“Hey,” I said. “Do you know anything about the Valtay Corporation?”

She paused, cocking her head to the side. “Where did you hear about them?”

I shrugged. “Just curious. I heard it somewhere.”

She smiled, but without humor. “Be careful. If they are somehow contacting you or trying to get to you, be very cautious. They’re a corporate system government, and they’re the ones who currently have an entire fleet parked outside of the Borant system, ready to collect on the debt. They were hours away from initiating a full-scale collection action when the Kua-Tin stopped them in their tracks by starting the season early. They’re one of the most powerful entities in the universe. The next season is going to be run by them.”

“Are they human?” I asked. I thought of Agatha. Was she one of these aliens? The idea seemed absurd.

“No,” she said. “Not usually. They’re a parasitic lifeform. They do utilize human bodies, but their homeworld is aquatic, and they much prefer water-

based hosts, such as the Kua-Tin or the Gleeners. They're known for their technological advancements. Their version of *Dungeon Crawler World* is less goblins and trolls and more android death machines and pulse rifles.

I contemplated telling her about Agatha, but I decided against it. I decided it would be best to just stay away from the woman the best I could.

Mongo pounced and chomped directly onto Donut's tail. She howled and started running in circles with Mongo still attached.

Odette shook her head. "You're gonna want to level that thing up as soon as you can. But make sure Donut has proper control over him first. Those little nibbles and nose chomps are cute now. They won't be so adorable when he's full-grown."

"Do you know how big he gets?"

"You honestly don't know what he is?" Odette asked. "He's a pretty common creature across the universe. They always seed the human worlds with those guys and the others before the humans develop. Most human kids love these things."

"He's a dinosaur of some sort. I know that much."

"He's a dinosaur all right. Mongoliensis." Her eyes flashed, in a similar way that Mordecai's did when he was searching through his menus. "Ahh, I see," she said after a moment. "The issue is the translation. 'Mongoliensis' is based off the scientific name. Your language had a more common name for those things."

The little chicken jumped up on Donut's back and squawked.

"You called them velociraptors."

I returned my gaze to the little monster. I'd been thrown off by the pink feathers and the beak. But now that she said it, I could see the monstrosity Mongo would soon become.

"I mean, it's obvious, isn't it?"

“Oh hell,” I finally said.

She laughed.

Donut came up to us, breathless. “Carl, is it time to go yet?”

“There’s one last piece of advice I’d like to give,” Odette said, looking at the both of us. She paused, as if uncertain about what she was about to say. She’d changed on a dime, suddenly looking different, almost sad. “It’s just a suggestion. I don’t know if, morally, this is a good idea or not, but this will greatly increase your chances of survival. It’s something to look for during class selection. It’s generally only offered to crawlers with a high charisma, so if it’s available, it’ll be hidden somewhere amongst Donut’s choices. The problem is, if you pick it, it’s going to make someone very angry.”

Welcome, Crawler to the third floor.

The previous level will collapse in 3 hours and 35 minutes.

We teleported straight from the green room to a long, golden hallway reminiscent of the first hallway we entered.

“Carl, look! We’re outside!” Donut said, looking up into the air.

Sure enough, a dark sky rose above us, dotted with stars. A colorful nebula, reminiscent of the background image on Odette’s stage covered the sky.

The air still felt stale. I pulled my slingshot, aimed it at the stars, and I fired.

Plink. Sure enough, the rock bounced off the ceiling, about 25 feet up.

“It’s an illusion,” I said. “It’s like that mall in Las Vegas. They make it look like you’re outside, but you’re really not.”

“Well that’s disappointing,” Donut said.

The walls and the ground were made of golden-colored bricks. A plush, red carpet led to a familiar door at the end of the hallway. As we approached, the door opened on its own. A tall figure stepped out, and all three of us stopped.

A well-built, young and disgustingly handsome man wearing a tuxedo waited for us. His skin was a dusky gray, and he had a short pair of devil horns jutting from his forehead. The man stood about my height, and he had long, gray and black hair that was held back in a ponytail. A barbed tail poked from the rear of his tuxedo. A pair of black, bat-like wings sat folded tightly against his back.

“Hello, Mordecai,” I said, examining his new form. “Jesus, dude. Looking good.”

“Wow,” Donut said, looking him up and down. “I wouldn’t kick you out of bed for eating crackers.”

Even Mongo’s customary screech sounded as if he was in awe.

Mordecai – Incubus. Level 50.
Guildmaster of this guildhall.
This is a Non-Combatant NPC.

Also known as the Gigachad of the Over City, Incubi are the male counterparts of the infamous Succubus. The smooth, seductive, and ultimately deadly Incubus can be identified by his stunning good looks, exquisite charm, and sensuous feet. They can only be found on the urban levels of the dungeon. They give new meaning to the phrase, “hit it and quit it.”

“Princess Donut, Carl, little Mongo, welcome to the third floor. The training levels have concluded. Now the games may truly begin,” Mordecai said, bowing slightly. Even his voice had gotten deeper. He indicated for us to enter.

We walked inside, and the door closed behind us.

“Training levels?” I said. “For fuck’s sake. You call those training levels?”

“Oh thank goodness,” Mordecai said once the door closed. He ripped the jacket off and pulled off the tie, unbuttoning the top three buttons. The jacket was odd, with a pair of long slits along the back to accommodate his wings. “I thought you two were never going to show up. I’ve been in this thing for three hours waiting for you. I hate formal wear.”

“The interview ran long,” I said. “I take it the general public can’t watch this part?”

“Nope,” he said. “They’ll watch you go in, and they’ll watch you come out, but they don’t get to see what’s going on inside. It’s like a jury room.”

His room was exactly the same as it had always been, but he’d cleaned up even further. A pair of beds had magically appeared since the last time we’d been in here.

“Those are for the transformation, if required,” he said. “Remember what happened with Donut when she took that enhanced pet biscuit?”

I swallowed, remembering the weird, gooey blob thing she’d transformed into before.

“So,” Mordecai said. “Have you decided who wants to go first? I suggest Princess...”

“Me,” Donut said, jumping up on one of the beds. “Let’s get this rolling.”

“Okay, Carl, take a seat,” Mordecai said. I sat in one of the chairs. Mongo jumped on my lap and squeaked, sounding concerned.

“Mommy will be okay,” Donut said. “You hang out with Uncle Carl for a few minutes while I get some work done. Behave yourself.”

The baby velociraptor settled into my lap. I suddenly felt uncomfortable having that many teeth so close to my crotch. If he bit me now, I didn’t

know what was going to happen. I suspected he wouldn't teleport away. Instead, he'd get frozen like Frank and Maggie had that one time. Hopefully, I wouldn't find out.

“Okay,” Mordecai said. He waved his hand, and a screen appeared floating in the air, like we were on Odette's show. “Your current race is ‘cat.’ This is a list of all the available races you may choose. It looks like you've been given 320 different choices. It is in alphabetical order, and you may click on any of them to drill down to a very specific set of details. Also, the system AI has narrowed it down to a set of three recommendations. We will spend the next hour or so going over these choices, and then I will...”

“I choose cat. Next.”

Mordecai took a deep breath. “Donut, there are a few choices on here where you'll actually look mostly...”

“Cat. Final answer. Let's move on.”

Mordecai looked at me. I shrugged. She'd made it clear from the start that she wasn't going to change. I was just happy she'd dropped the idea of me turning into a cat also.

“Okay, then,” he said. “A message will pop up, and you have to confirm your choice by clicking on it.”

“Wait,” I said, a horrific thought coming to me. “It's not going to, you know, change her back to the way she was before is it?”

“Too late,” Donut said. She glowed for a moment. “I clicked it.” She looked at her paw. “I feel the same.”

“No,” Mordecai said. He looked pointedly at Donut. “But it is important to ask questions like that. I made it so she actually chose to not make a choice. Nothing will change, but she will now have access to a few racial benefits she didn't have before.”

“Benefits? What are they?” Donut asked.

“I don’t know, Princess Donut,” Mordecai said, sounding exasperated. “We never got to examine the cat choice in the menu. You’ll be able to see when we’re done. And you wouldn’t have changed yet anyway. The change doesn’t happen until the end of the process.”

“Okay, Donut,” I said. “We need to think carefully about this next choice. Let’s see what the AI suggests. Okay?”

“Let’s do this,” she said. “Show me anything with the word princess or queen in the title.”

“Okay, moving on,” Mordecai said. A list of items appeared on the screen, though the list appeared to be much shorter than the last one.

Mordecai paused, his eyes flashing as he quickly looked over the selections. “Okay, Princess Donut. It looks as if you’ve been given 34 class choices. That’s a pretty short list. In fact, it’s the shortest I’ve ever seen, but I think that’s a combination of your racial choice and a result of your stats. Your base constitution is still two,” He paused. “No, actually it’s four now thanks to your racial choice of cat. That’s still awfully low.” He again searched through his unseen menus. “Oh, I see now. It’s actually a combination of four things. You both also have that Desperado pass, which precludes several of the classes right off the bat. And Donut has that tiara on her head, which narrows it even further. But that’s all right, there are still a few great choices on there.”

“So what’s good?” Donut asked, looking at the list. “Ohh, that one sounds cool. It sounds menacing yet mysterious and fun. I pick that one.”

“Wait,” I said, jumping to my feet. I caught the now-asleep Mongo in the crook of my arm and rushed to the screen. “Do *not* pick anything yet until we’ve looked it over carefully.”

Donut pointed at something entitled **NecroBard**.

Mordecai grunted. “That’s actually not a bad choice. It’s one of the three recommendations.

I looked over the list. The only base classes available to her were **Bard**, **Magic-User**, and **Barbarian**. Each of the base classes had a few additional items under them, including **Necromancer**, **Wind Mage**, and **Warlock**. The **NecroBard** subclass was listed under both **Bard** and **Necromancer**. There was also an **Earth Class** heading, and the majority of the available items were listed under there. Included on that list were several interesting items, including **Feral Cat Berserker**, **Animal Test Subject**, and **Roller Derby Immortal** .

I looked at the list of the three AI-picked recommendations. They were:

Artist Alley Mogul

NecroBard

And

Former Child Actor

I said a silent thank you to the game gods that they hadn't named the roller derby one "Derby Queen." She probably would've insisted upon picking it without reading anything. We'd discussed this, and we had a loose plan based on Odette's advice. But Donut was also prone to go off the rails from time to time.

"Donut," I said. "Click on each of the three recommendations so we can see the information."

"I'm telling you right now I am absolutely not choosing this one," Donut said as she clicked on the first choice.

Artist Alley Mogul

This Charisma and Intelligence-based class is the modern-day merchant. Using your superior artistic talent to entertain and entice fellow nerds, the Artist Alley Mogul travels the world to sell her copyright-infringing wares. While not particularly menacing

physically, this plucky merchant is extremely difficult to hurt. Members of this class receive the following benefits:

+5 Dexterity

Instant access to the level-5 *Shield* spell.

A 25% discount at all stores plus a 15% bonus to money earned from sales.

10% Interest earned on all coins upon descent to the next level.

Level-5 Pathfinder skill

Access to Enhanced Dodge, which allows the Dodge skill to train to level 20.

Level-5 Dodge skill. (Already obtained)

Additional subclasses become available on the sixth floor.

This is an Earth Class. As an incentive to choose an Earth Class, you will receive a Silver Earth Box upon choosing this class.

Mordecai grunted. “That incentive is a little weak compared to what they usually do. It’s usually a gold box and a couple stat points.”

“I’m not surprised,” I muttered. My eyes immediately focused on that Pathfinder skill. Odette had said I needed to find something with that skill. But we were looking for something else, too.

“Still,” Mordecai said. “This is a very good choice for her. If she can get Dodge over level 15, she will be almost impossible to hit. And a 25% discount at stores is great, too. That’ll be on top of the bonus she already gets from her charisma. Stuff will be half-price for her, and that’s a huge deal. But most importantly, you’d have access to the Pathfinder skill. It’ll make finding stairwells, shops, and guilds much easier.”

“Yeah, no,” Donut said. “Artist Alley? Really? Aren’t those the nerds that like *Star Wars* and draw pictures of cats dressed like the guys from *A-Team* and stuff?” She shuddered.

“It’s a good choice,” I said. “Let’s look at the other two.”

NecroBard

This unusual class combines one of the most-loved occupations with one of the most reviled. Necromancers specialize in magic related to raising the dead. Bards must choose an entertainment-based skill. Depending on this choice, whether it be singing, the kazoo, or storytelling, the resulting crawler will use this skill to either entertain, protect, or glamour both the living and the dead.

The NecroBard receives the following benefits:

Instant access to a level-5 entertainment-based skill of their choice.

Access to all membership-based clubs, regardless of current memberships.

Free rooms at all saferooms.

A 10% mana cost penalty on all non-Necromancer or Bard spells.

Instant access to the Level-3 *Turn Undead* Spell.

Instant access to the Level-3 *Panty Dropper* Spell.

+5 to Constitution, Charisma, and Intelligence.

-2 Strength

Additional benefits depending on entertainment-based skill choice.

“So help me god,” I said. “I will abandon you right here and right now if you choose to take up the kazoo.”

“I could play an instrument,” Donut said, voice full of wonder. “I could be a singer!”

“We want to keep viewers, remember?” I said.

“What this description doesn’t say is that a lot of the necromancer spells will be cast with her instrument,” Mordecai said. “And that means she won’t have to use spell points to cast them. That’s pretty huge. Plus each instrument has a long list of additional benefits. This is a solid choice if you end up picking a DPS class. Something that does a lot of damage. She’ll have a wide range of both protection and other support skills.”

“Carl, look! I could get a harmonica!” Donut said. She’d pulled up the submenu of entertainment skills. She gasped. “Bongos. They have bongos, Carl.”

“Harmonica? How would that even work?” I said. “You don’t have thumbs.”

“You don’t need thumbs for the harmonica, Carl. Not if I get one of those neck thingies.”

I had a quick vision of tiny Zev attempting to strangle me after I allowed Donut to take up a ridiculous instrument. “Please, let’s just look at that third choice.”

Former Child Actor

This rare subclass is an offshoot of the Character Actor class. It can only be obtained by Crawlers who have both received the “Cut!” achievement and have obtained at least one trillion views.

Once a spoiled brat superstar, then addicted to drugs, you have crawled back from the brink stronger than ever. You are ready for your comeback. This Charisma and Chance-based class could go either way. You’ll either rise to the top, or you’ll be dead in a ditch in a week.

This unique Earth class is based on the Bard/Rogue Jack-Of-All-Trades subclass, but with a few distinctive differences.

In addition to the following benefits, the most distinct aspect of this multi-faceted class is the Level-3 Character Actor skill. This skill increases in level only upon descent to the next floor.

Additional benefits:

Immunity to all poisons and diseases.

Level-5 Cockroach skill.

+10 to Charisma.

+15% faster growth in all Charisma-based skills.

The Manager Benefit.

This is an Earth Class. As an incentive to choose an Earth Class, you will receive a Silver Earth Box upon choosing this class.

I watched Donut's eyes get huge upon reading this one.

“What the hell is the Character Actor skill? Or the Cockroach skill?” I asked. “And what was the ‘Cut!’ achievement? I don’t remember that one.”

“I got it for being a good actress,” Donut said. “When we tricked the goblin shamankas.”

“Okay, but it doesn’t explain what the character actor part means. Mordecai?”

Mordecai didn’t say anything for several moments. His lip was curled in displeasure. On that incubus face of his, it looked downright menacing.

“What?” he said. “Oh, so Character Actor. It’s a bit complicated. Basically every floor, Donut has to pick a specialty.”

“Specialty?” I asked.

“She can basically pick a new class each floor. Each floor from now on will have a theme. So it would be somewhat useful. If it’s a floor filled with ice monsters, she can pick a fire class, and so forth. But it’s also a chance-based skill. So if she chooses it, and then she chooses a fire mage, the system AI basically rolls the dice and decides how many fire mage spells and skills to give to her. And as soon as she’s done with the floor, she loses the skills and starts over. Each higher level of the Character Actor skill, however, gives better skills. It makes it so she is pretty weak for the early levels, but once you get higher, it can be quite powerful depending on her class choices.”

“I don’t think I like that,” I said. “It leaves too much to chance. What about her existing skills, like *Magic Missile* and the like?”

“Those are untouched. But if she chooses a class that has a penalty for those skills or spells, they will apply. For example, if she chooses a Necromancer specialty, that *Magic Missile* spell will cost 10% more to cast, but just for the length of that floor. Or if she chooses Warlock, her constitution will go down one point for the length of that floor.”

I liked that she would be immune to poison and diseases. “What’s the cockroach skill?”

“Basically, it gives a chance to survive a fatal attack. At level five she’s guaranteed one free lethal hit a fight, though she’d be near death afterward. At level ten, your health doesn’t go down at all after the first fatal strike. The problem is, the only way to train that skill is by using it. Or with potions, but that can get expensive.”

“I like it,” Donut said. “If I pick it, then I can just choose NecroBard as my specialty every floor, but pick a different instrument every time. Wouldn’t that be neat? It’s the best of both worlds!”

“Not necessarily, Donut,” I said. “If you get a bad roll from the AI, you might get stuck with underpowered skills and spells until the next floor.”

“Exactly,” Mordecai said.

“Let’s spend some time looking at the other choices,” I said. “But of the three, I think I like the Artist Alley one the best.”

“I agree,” Mordecai said. “I think the NecroBard *might* be better. But you’re right, Carl. It’s a... dangerous choice for your social numbers.”

We spent some time going over the other choices, carefully looking at all the abilities. The Feral Cat Berserker was basically a barbarian that’d end up getting her killed immediately thanks to her low health, and the Animal Test Subject was a mage that specialized in using poison. It also caused the crawler to glow green. Warlock was a solid choice in terms of skills, but it caused her to lose one point of Constitution, which would make her just too fragile. The others used mostly melee-based attacks and weren’t really suitable.

I took a deep breath. “Donut, I know you’re not excited about it. But I really think you should go with the Artist Alley Mogul class. It’s not perfect, but it’s the most well-rounded.”

“Okay,” she said.

I exchanged a look with Mordecai to see if he was buying it. He appeared skeptical. “Really?” I said.

She approximated a shrug. “We gotta do what’s best for the team, right? You want me to be a nerd, I’ll be a nerd.”

DONUT: CARL ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THIS? HE IS GOING TO BE REALLY MAD.

Carl: Do it.

“Okay, then,” Mordecai said. “The menu is going to pop up now, and you have to scroll down and choose it.”

Donut glowed for a moment. A moment later, she glowed again. “Done. I am now a stupid Artist Alley Mogul.”

“Goddamnit, Donut!” Mordecai cried. “God fucking damnit!”

“And scene,” Donut said, waving her paw.

“Whoa,” I said. Mongo stirred in my arms. “What’s happening?”

“Mordecai dear, that’s Carl’s line. You should pick something else. Carl, he’s upset because I chose the Former Child Actor class. I was acting! Isn’t it great?”

“That not acting,” I said. “It’s called lying.”

“It wasn’t a lie. Not technically. I picked the Artist Alley Mogul as my third-floor specialty. It’s basically the same thing anyway, so I don’t see why he’s so upset. It said I received all the benefits except the 25% discount. Or the *Shield* spell. Or that Pathfinder skill.”

“That’s like all of the usable benefits, Donut.” I sighed. “At least your Charisma is now higher. And you have that Cockroach skill.”

“And I’m immune to poison and disease!”

“Yeah,” Mordecai said drily. “And you’ve received the Manager benefit.”

“Oh yeah,” I said. “What *is* that?”

I already knew exactly what the Manager benefit was. Odette had explained it in detail.

“That’s me,” Mordecai said. “*I’m* the manager. From now on, for the remainder of your time in this godsforsaken place, I will instantly teleport to any saferoom you are in.”

“Yay!” Donut cried.

“No, not yay,” Mordecai said. “I was supposed to transfer to a magic guild after this floor. I *like* running the magic guild. My room gets bigger, and I have access to my potions and more spells. Now every time you sleep or eat or stop to brush your teeth, I’ll be forced to spend my time with you. Away from my room and my clothes and food. Oh gods, and I’ve lost my tunnel access. No more television. No more access to the information codex. And

since I can no longer watch you stumbling around the dungeon, I will have no warning for when I'm to be teleported away. And if you buy a personal space..." He started grumbling under his breath.

"That wasn't cool, Donut," I said.

DONUT: I TOLD YOU HE'D BE MAD. I DON'T LIKE PEOPLE MAD AT ME, CARL.

Carl: Yeah, he's pissed. Sorry about that.

"If you do pick the Manager benefit, and it's not attached to an obvious choice, you'll want to make it look like a mistake," Odette had said. "Don't ask him about it, because once he tells you what it is, it'll be too late. He won't be allowed to tell you unless you ask. Make it look like it was all Donut's idea, and you didn't have anything to do with it. Mordecai can hold a grudge, but he still sees Donut as a child. He'll forgive her. If he ever found out *you* did this on purpose, he would never forgive you."

"What if that manager benefit is attached to a class that isn't as good?" I said. "I like having him around, but it doesn't seem like that great of a trade-off if it hobbles Donut."

"There's a lot he can't tell you or help you with as a game guide. As a manager, that's all out the window. He'll lose access to the codex, and everything he tells you will have to be from his own memory. But Mordecai has been in the dungeon for a very long time, and that brain of his is the single greatest resource any crawler can have. As long as he *wants* to help you, it'll be the next best thing to having him in the party. He'll be able to use the chat feature. He is an alchemical master. Get him in front of an Alchemist's table, and he'll be able to make you potions. Surely you can see the benefit in that."

I did, indeed, see the benefit in it. So we decided to take Odette's advice. I didn't like lying or tricking Mordecai. He was as close to a friend as I could get to an alien, and I knew this could irreparably harm that trust and friendship if he ever found out. Furthermore, I didn't trust Odette. We now

owed her, and she potentially held something over us. But I did trust that she wanted us to survive for as long as possible.

After quickly discussing it with Donut, we'd decided the risk was worth it. We would pick that benefit if it was available.

Mordecai's well-chiseled face groused. His smoldering eyes focused on Donut. "Well congratulations, crawler. You are now Princess Donut the Level 13 Former Child Actor Cat. Welcome to the third fucking floor."

Mordecai glared at me.

"Your turn," he said.

A note from DoctorHepa

Next up, Carl's choices coming at the end of the week! Sorry for not putting them together, but this chapter is pretty chonky already, at least for me. And the Carl chapter is very crunchy. I hope ya'll are doing well.

A couple days ago, Jeff Hays from Soundbooth Theater Live did a live reading of Carl and Donut and the Hoarder scene, and I think it came out pretty funny. I encourage you to watch the whole thing, but the segment starts at about 8:30ish

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_ZBrfDxGRY