

LIBRIS

We know
books

THE EYE OF THE BEDLAM BRIDE

DUNGEON CRAWLER CARL BOOK SIX

MATT DINNIMAN

MICHAEL



JOSEPH

LBRIS

We know
books

**THE
EYE OF
THE BEDLAM
BRIDE**

OMG. WHAT A FLOOR!

Hi, everyone!

Thank you so much for signing up for the Princess Posse fan club newsletter! This is the only OFFICIAL fan club. I heard rumors of another group called the Donut Holes, and while I appreciate their enthusiasm, this is the ONLY place to get THIS newsletter. I absolutely DO NOT approve of the name Donut Holes.

Anyway!

My name is GC, BWR, NW Princess Donut the Queen Anne Chonk, and I am here to give you a quick recap of what happened on the last few floors. I know we should have been doing this the whole time, and perhaps I will talk Carl into going back and helping me write proper recaps of what happened in the past, but you're here now, and we're about to start the eighth floor. Here's what happened on the sixth and seventh.

The sixth floor started with Carl temporarily giving up the Gate of the Feral Gods to Orren the liaison because he was afraid Carl would get all Carl-y and use it to ruin the floor. I didn't see this happen, but I imagine Carl was all grumpy about it. It ended up being a good thing because we got Sledgie and three other cretin rock bodyguards to escort us for the next three floors in exchange! Isn't that great?

I got the most exquisite temporary class. I was a Legendary Diva! I could cast spells when I sing!

(I hear my album will soon be available on tunneling platforms, so be sure to upgrade to Ultimate Supreme Fan Tier Three or above to get a free ten-second preview of each song before they're released!)

This was the floor where the stupid hunters were trying to kill us. That didn't work out too well for them, now did it? There was this one bug lady, and her name was Vrah. We killed her annoying little sister right in the beginning, and that made Vrah really mad. When Carl went to that lame CrawlCon later on, he met Vrah's mom and made *her* really mad, too. So mad she flew all the way to Earth just to participate as a god named Diwata.

Katia left the party so she could hunt down Eva, her player-killer ex-best friend, and that was really sad because I liked being in a party with Katia. She managed to get Eva in the end, though, and I really hope she'll come back to the party. I love Carl, of course, but it would be nice to have her back. I miss having her with us. I suppose now that she's in love with Daniel Bautista, he'd have to come with her. That would be okay, too, even if he looks like a generic-brand Tony the Tiger.

We learned at the end of the floor there would be a party with a talent contest and pet show for the hunters and the top 50 crawlers. It would be at the High Elf Castle, led by the mean Queen Imogen. The party was called the Butcher's Masquerade.

My Mongo met a few fellow dinosaurs, including a female mongoliensis named Kiwi. Honestly, I don't want to talk about how that started because it was highly traumatic for my brave, sweet boy, whose innocence was savagely ripped away from him. He's still healing.

Also, way back on the third floor, we met a bra-deficient elite named Signet covered in gross tattoos. You may have seen her show, as Carl and I were both guest stars. It was called *Vengeance of the Daughter*. Carl was contractually bound to continue with that story, which was to help her reclaim her crown and defeat Queen Imogen of the High Elves, who helped kill Signet's mother a long time ago.

My friend Prepotente and his former person, Miriam Dom, got in a bit of trouble, and, unfortunately, Miriam Dom passed away. But Prepotente was a very brave goat about it. Miriam used to have another goat, too, one named Bianca who is quite friendly when you get to

know her. She's a demon-goat-dragon thing, and she and Prepotente are off on their own now.

I got into a little tussle with a crawler named Lucia Mar, and I killed one of her disgusting dogs, who absolutely deserved it. We later found out that there's something weird going on with Lucia Mar that I honestly just don't understand, but Florin, our Crocodilian friend who says he's from France but was in Africa and has an Australian accent, is determined to find out that full story. He used to hate her because Lucia killed his girlfriend, but now they're friends. I think. I'm not sure honestly.

We had a quest to find and help a giant allosaurus ballerina named Big Tina. It turns out Kiwi is Big Tina's mom, and they both used to be bears. They were changed when Scolopendra, the final boss of the whole dungeon, attacked a long time ago.

And then my ex-boyfriend, Ferdinand, just randomly showed up, thinking he could just waltz right back into my life and I would swoon over him. As if. He was now the pet of Queen Imogen of the High Elves.

All of this time, we were preparing for the Butcher's Masquerade. Mongo prepared for the pet show, training tirelessly, and I coordinated for the talent show. Carl figured out that Queen Imogen would be a country boss, and we had to be ready for it.

When the party came, all of this stuff happened at once. Signet finally got her revenge against Imogen, though it was really sad because she had to kill herself to do it. My Mongo and Kiwi killed Vrah, and I helped kill her mom with my *Laundry Day* spell. Carl killed the last hunter, meaning we got all of them. At the same time, YOU GUYS really pulled through! We used the funds from the fan club, and OMG WE DID IT. We bought a spot on Faction Wars!

Thanks to Carl and Sledgie, we got all of Signet's former tattoos and helpers, Kiwi and Tina, and all of the changelings into the elf castle, and we teleported the whole castle to the ninth floor, meaning we now have an official army. Ferdinand, too, though we don't know if he's going to help us when we get there. Carl and I are now ninth-floor warlords! Isn't that great? There's not much we can do about that on this new eighth floor, but because we're warlords, we can vote for stuff

that happens on Faction Wars. Carl is trying to make it so we can all really kill each other. Nobody thinks that's going to happen. We'll see. Carl is good at making impossible things possible.

It wasn't all good. Lots of sad things happened. My friend Firas died. He was really nice. Another guy named Gideon died. I didn't know him very well except in the chat, but Carl was sad because he'd talked Gideon into helping us. Gwendolyn Duet died. This mushroom guy who was a really good singer died. The Popov brothers died, too, but then something amazing happened. They turned into babies and were kicked out of the game. Zev said they were okay! That made everyone happy.

Also, the crime of the century was committed during the Butcher's Masquerade.

An evil, vile, experience-hog crawler named Tserendolgor somehow managed to get her hands on the voting ballot box for the pet show and changed the votes, stealing Mongo's crown from him and handing it off to her disgusting meatball pet, Garret. I want you guys to continue to pore over the footage and find the smoking gun. I've seen some of your investigative efforts so far, and I'm looking forward to more. We need definitive proof! We *will* stop this injustice! #JusticeForMongo.

I, of course, found myself at the top of the crawler list after my performance at the talent show.

And then, right when we thought we were going to the seventh floor, Prepotente broke the whole thing! We pretty much went straight from the sixth to the eighth, but not before I briefly chose a new class. I was a Viper Queen for a few minutes.

And that's it. I know, I know. I'm missing so much. I didn't talk about Samantha and the body Signet gave her to use, or how Britney got burned, or how Tran lost his legs, or about how Zev got a promotion because the Borant government lost control of the crawl to the Valtay brain worms. Or that weird ring Carl got that I think is giving him headaches.

Nor have I talked about Miss Beatrice's return and appearance on Odette's program. It's not worth examining, and I haven't thought about it once since it happened, and there's nothing more to discuss.

LBDS

We know

Anyway, thank you again for subscribing. Remember to pay your dues! If you forget, you stop getting the newsletter and all the other great benefits, and we don't want that. For an extra twenty credits a week, you get access to the super-exclusive Team Mongo Mommies, which grants entrance to the platinum private Mongo Mommies chat room, officially licensed Mongo merch, along with access to a very special song I wrote all about him! I love you all!

XOXO

Best in Dungeon, Current Reigning Champion, GC, BWR, NW
Princess Donut the Queen Anne Chonk
Co-Warlord of the Princess Posse Faction Wars Team

PROLOGUE

WARNING: LEVEL COLLAPSE IS IMMINENT.

"IT'S TWO GODS," ODETTE CRIED. "GET READY!"

The twin monstrosities appeared, towering out of the mist like a pair of uneven mountains. One was almost three times the size of the other. Odette hadn't been expecting there to be two gods, but she wasn't surprised. The summoning box did that sometimes, especially this deep.

"Two gods?" Chaco shouted from his spot near the stairwell. "Is it still going to work?"

"Gods, I hope so," Odette muttered.

Her non-corporeal avatar floated between her crawlers and the two storm deities. She zoomed with her helmet, trying to see what gods they were. Relief flooded her when she focused on the smaller of the two. Dodola, which was whom Mordecai had been attempting to summon. The other, larger deity was Adad.

ODETTE: You need to get back here.

MORDECAI: I'm trying. I don't think I can fly in this downpour. Are they storm gods? Did it work?

ODETTE: It worked. Now hurry. Don't let them see you. Try your slake raven form.

Sizzling acid rain poured from the heavens, melting everything it touched. Odette zoomed in farther, watching the aura of both the gods. The hulking form of Adad was AI controlled. The smaller, female Dodola was sponsored. The name **Huanxin** blazed there with a little green dot, meaning the grixist sponsor was present and driving the storm goddess.

Odette opened a new chat window.

ODETTE: Infusing the summoning box with a chain-lightning potion worked. It's Huanxin like you said it would be.

The floor was almost done. The nine puzzle pieces had all been collected. They just needed one more activation, and the four crawlers could leave and enter the stairwell down to the eleventh floor. She looked nervously at the clock. It would be close.

ARMITA: I'm not certain about this.

ODETTE: This was your godsdamned idea. We don't have time. Tell her we're in place and that we have a deal.

ARMITA: I already did. She just wrote back. She wants a bigger cut. She says 10% is too little. She wants 33.

ODETTE: Godsdamn it. You tell that rich cunt we don't need her, then. She can just fuck off. We summoned two gods. We'll use the other one.

The bonus Odette received if Mordecai reached the eleventh floor would be just enough money that she could buy a residency berth in the inner system. She wouldn't be considered wealthy by any means, not like she would if Mordecai reached the 12th, but she would have just enough to get herself settled. She would be a citizen, guaranteed shelter and oxygen and food, which would allow her to finally be safe. She'd have access to free body regeneration, allowing her to regrow her legs. She'd finally be able to put this nightmare behind her.

She still had five seasons left on her indentureship, but per her contract, they'd knock nine seasons off if one of her crawlers reached the eleventh floor. If they opened that stairwell and Mordecai made it down, Odette would be free. Finally.

But if she paid 33% of her bonus to that raging bitch, she wouldn't have enough money. She'd have to settle somewhere as a non-citizen, always scrambling. It'd take another 100 cycles to earn enough, and only if she was lucky enough to get a job. It would never end. Even that 10% she'd already promised was cutting it close.

LORDS

We know

She thought of Huanxin Jinx, the grixist heiress who sponsored Dodola every season. Odette pictured herself strangling the thin-necked, hairy bitch until all six eyes popped out of her head.

They could quadruple that bonus, and it would be nothing but a day's allowance to Huanxin. She wasn't doing this for the money. This was how she entertained herself. The Ascendancy battles didn't start until the crawlers reached the twelfth floor or they were zeroed out, and the heiress was bored. Nothing more.

Armita, Odette's friend and former party member, had secured herself a gig as a Demigod Attendant for the Celestial Ascendancy, and this whole scheme had been her idea. The AI subroutines didn't regularly monitor communications between NPCs, and they were legally forbidden from monitoring Ascendancy sponsor communications. She was working as the go-between.

When it became clear that Mordecai's team was going to need the intervention of a storm god to survive, it'd been Armita who suggested talking to Huanxin. They'd ask the rich heiress if she'd be willing to drive Dodola to the door location and hit the puzzle with a spell. She'd agreed, for a price.

Without the bribe, the legality of having Armita break character and ask a sponsor for their assistance was sketchy at best. Once money became involved, it clearly became cheating, especially since Odette would be reaping actual credits as a result of the help. It was cheating, and it was fraud.

But what choice did she have? This whole tenth floor had been a disaster. From the start, the crawlers were given a choice of four tracks. Uzzi had blindly chosen the most difficult path. The location of the exit was revealed, but multiple steps had to be completed in order to open the door.

Less than 200 crawlers had survived the Faction Wars chaos, which was usual. The skyfowl seasons typically ended with a ninth-floor slaughter. The idiots always wanted to participate in the fighting. Half of the survivors had taken deals right at the beginning of the tenth. And then half of the rest had died making their way through the floor. Odette only knew of five others who'd made it to the eleventh so far.

Mordecai still hadn't returned. His ability to change forms had made him the best candidate to place the summoning box and activate it.

He'd had to place it far enough away where they had time to prime the puzzle, but not too far so the god wouldn't notice them.

Behind her, Chaco, Hold Steady, and Uzzi worked furiously to prepare the final ritual. Chaco was a wolf-headed pterolykos. The other two had chosen to remain skyfowl, like 91% of their kind. Hold Steady worked his magic, keeping the puzzle pieces primed. Chaco plucked at the strings of his tar, attracting the attention of the gods with his bard magic. Uzzi guarded them both. The skyfowl warrior had limited magic, despite his Storm Commander class, but he had a party-protection spell that kept the caustic rain from burning them all.

The nine pieces pulsed red a few times before turning blue. It was ready. Only one last step remained. The puzzle needed to physically touch a storm god *or* be hit with god-tier storm magic. If either of those happened, the key would form and the door would open.

But it wasn't as simple as dropping the completed puzzle disc on the head of a god from afar. The puzzle needed to *stay* primed, constantly infused with magic, which required Hold Steady to remain nearby. And the puzzle had to remain within the circle of the stairwell.

This last part was next to impossible, and they'd all wanted to take a deal rather than risk not making it.

Odette had already earned her tenth-floor bonus no matter what happened. She'd convinced them to go for it, despite the difficulty. It wasn't all greed. She liked all the party members, especially Mordecai. It was never worth it to take a deal on the tenth floor. Never. They were better off dead.

They were close. So damn close.

ARMITA: I'm not telling her that, Odette. You know how petty she is.

If they could get either storm god to hit the puzzle with a spell—any spell—they'd be good to go. If Chaco's *Lightning Rod* song worked properly, any spells thrown in their general direction would hit the target. The problem was, the crawlers needed to remain nearby. The whole level was about to collapse.

It was always a bad idea to stay in the vicinity of a god. Always.

LIBRIS

We know

Huanxin had the ability to enchant the rain. She could make it healing rain or turn each drop into a mob or a thousand other things. It was already raining. All she needed to do was cast the spell, the magic rain would hit the puzzle, and that would be enough. All four party members would make it to the eleventh floor, and then they could reevaluate their survival chances.

If Huanxin refused to help, they still had Adad. He was likely to summon a cloud of lightning-shooting bugs at any moment. With Chaco's spell, the bugs would still target the puzzle. It wasn't ideal, but it would work.

Warning: Level collapse will commence in minus three.

The number 99 appeared flashing in her interface. The units started to count down.

Odette cursed herself for getting involved in this. They could've done it without cheating. She hadn't trusted the team. This would've worked without the bribe.

ODETTE: What is taking you so long?

MORDECAI: I'm grounded, in a bipedal form. I didn't have enough power to choose anything else. I'm too far from Uzzi's protection, and I have to use my *Climate Refuge* spell.

ODETTE: Hurry your feathered ass!

MORDECAI: I think the two gods are about to fight!

ODETTE: Probably not this time. Dodola—

Odette didn't finish. She watched in horror as Dodola suddenly turned and stabbed something into the leg of the much larger Adad. The god disappeared. She'd teleported him away. She turned toward the three crawlers and started casually marching in their direction.

ARMITA: She says she's changed her mind again. Now she wants 50%, and if you don't agree, she's going to zero out the party. I'm sorry, Odette. This is all my fault.

She had to agree. What else could she do? She looked back at the three crawlers huddled by the exit. The round puzzle floated in midair with Uzzi and Hold Steady right behind it. Chaco stood to the side, still plucking at his instrument.

But then, a wave of anger washed over Odette. She thought of the dungeon AI forcing her to choose between saving Armita and Pieter. She'd only had seconds. Her best friend versus her cousin. She'd picked her friend. For Odette's entire life, people were taking advantage of her. Forcing her to submit, to choose. Telling her what to do. They'd taken her entire planet. Her people. Her family. Pieter was a good, sweet boy. But he wasn't as strong as Armita. They'd forced Odette to fight. Forced her to work in this dungeon for so, so long. Every step forward she'd made was only because she'd first had to ask someone else's permission to do so. She was tired of always being bullied. She was tired of being forced to choose between two equally terrible results.

She looked up at the approaching deity. Huanxin Jinx. Fuck that bitch.

ODETTE: Armita, tell her we don't have a deal.

- **ARMITA:** Are you sure?

ODETTE: Yes.

She then moved to a new chat, but before she could type out the message, she was interrupted by Mordecai.

MORDECAI: Dodola is a sponsored god. She's not going to help us.

I'm sorry, my friends. I have a plan, but it's going to kill me.

Uzzi, see you on the other side, brother.

UZZI: Do not even dare.

Odette waved away her first message and moved to her private chat with Mordecai.

ODETTE: What the hells are you doing?

LORDS

We know

MORDECAI: My Final Blow skill. It lets me target the puzzle. It's at the top of the list. Odette, I think this is what I'm supposed to do with it. It's why the AI gave it to me.

If Mordecai targeted the puzzle and then got himself hit with a spell from the god, the puzzle would also get hit by the spell. Up until now, the skill only allowed him to target individuals. He'd been using it to great effect, allowing him to find invisible and hidden mobs.

It was a desperate last act. He wouldn't be protected from the spell.

If Mordecai died, Odette's season would be done. She'd be stuck here for five more crawls at least.

The timer was down to 65 units.

ODETTE: Wait thirty units. Keep moving toward us. Let me try something first.

Before he could answer, she pulled that second chat back up.

ODETTE: Chaco, do you have the dart?

CHACO: Yes! But how can that help now?

They'd spent half of their time on this floor hunting down the priceless artifact only for it to be useless. When they'd learned that it had to be a specific type of god to unlock the puzzle, it'd ruined all of their plans since none of them had seen a storm god before this. This whole floor had been them choosing between four paths, and each time, they'd ended up picking the worst possible choice. They'd instead had to find the summoning cube, which wasn't much better.

If only it had been a holy grenade. They'd been everywhere on the previous floor.

ODETTE: There's only one way to survive. Worship Dodola and then use the dart.

CHACO: What? No. Who would I even use it on? Would that even work? She's already summoned.