

Unholy Player

#Chapter 1: Prison Planet Theory - Read Unholy Player

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This Chapter is the prologue. You may skip it if you wish, but I recommend reading it. It's quite engaging and won't take much of your time.

In a world filled with dirt,

Being stupid is a privilege, while the smart must exert.

A certain scientist stumbled upon a theory;

Something so intriguing, yet shrouded in mystery.

The "***Prison Planet Theory.***"

At its core, the theory claims that the planet is nothing but a cosmic prison—a place where humans are trapped in an endless cycle of reincarnation.

When a person dies, their soul is wiped clean of memories, only to be reborn once again in this world, cursed to live a life with no purpose or true meaning.

Even though this notion was something most scientists would laugh at without giving it much thought, this particular scientist decided to delve into it, living up to the 'mad scientist' nickname given to him by his colleagues and the public.

And so, he began his search, driven by the need to uncover the truth, if any, buried beneath the hypothesis.

His perspective was always unique.

While others gazed at the stars, lost in wonder at what lay beyond, he walked the earth, following clues hidden beneath the vast blue sky.

As they built rockets to explore distant planets, he studied ancient texts, searching for forgotten wisdom from civilizations that spoke of worlds beyond their own.

While they mapped the stars with machines and science, he wandered through ruins, listening to the whispers of the past, believing the answers were closer than anyone realized.

And finally, after years of relentless effort, exhausting his resources, and dedicating his life, he found what he had been searching for.

Some might call it an invention, others a discovery, but those labels meant little in the grand scheme.

What truly mattered was that he had found a small tear in the fabric of the world, like a crack in the walls of a prison.

A rift leading to the other side of existence.

He had spent most of his life searching for this rift. Now that he had found it, he was determined to spend the rest of his journey exploring whatever lay beyond.

But before he could begin, there were two crucial questions he needed to answer, no matter the cost.

Yet, he never got the chance to find the answers, as things took an unexpected turn.

Not a single soul, not even the mad scientist himself, could understand when or why it started, but it all happened in an instant.

One moment, the sky was filled with countless streaks of light, zipping across the heavens like falling stars, leaving glowing trails behind.

The next, those trails crashed into the earth, vanishing in a blinding flash before the ground erupted with violent explosions.

This was it.

A world war was in the making.

And this time, it wasn't swords being wielded but humanity's deadliest weapons.

Nuclear warheads.

Until now, no one had ever doubted the destructive force of a single nuclear missile.

No one questioned what the detonation of thousands of them could unleash upon the planet.

But alas,

They were still forced to experience this catastrophe as their reality, as if proving what they already knew.

In a single night, cities were reduced to rubble, homes becoming tombs for their inhabitants.

Rivers and lakes vanished, leaving only deep craters in their place.

Forests turned into fiery graves, consuming the lives within.

The moment was hellish, and the aftermath was no kinder.

Governments fell, nations split, and order was completely destroyed. While some perished in the explosions, countless others fell in the years that followed, victims of hunger, lack of shelter, and the deadly diseases unleashed by radiation and chemical weapons that had tainted the land.

Humanity had brought its end upon itself. Yet, fortunately, hope had not been fully extinguished.

Humans have always been a species that learns from their mistakes, grows through challenges, and emerges from the ashes.

And this time was no different.

After many years, people began to emerge from their shelters. Among them, twelve stood out. They weren't just wise enough to build underground bunkers and survive the catastrophe. They also had the resources, influence, and leadership needed to begin rebuilding humanity.

In a world scarred by wounds and limited in resources, each of them claimed a territory for themselves. Using all the means at their disposal, they constructed shelter cities, restoring order and creating a place where humans could once again thrive in society.

Many years passed, and under the leadership of these individuals, who would later be known as the city managers, life on the planet gradually returned to a semblance of normal, though it was never quite the same as it had been before.

They built monuments everywhere, offering daily sermons to remind people of their past mistakes and vow never to repeat them.

But there was still something they had long since forgotten.

The once-famous mad scientist had vanished from the collective memory of the people, just as he had disappeared in the explosions that marked that fateful day.

No one truly knew what he had discovered, and no one had the chance to answer the two questions he had asked himself that day:

Is Earth truly a prison built to trap humanity for eternity?

And,

If Earth is indeed a prison for our souls, what choices or mistakes led us to be imprisoned here?

Until...

Chapter 2 - New MMORPG

August 10th, Year 215 of the Requiem Calendar.

University Campus, Shelter City 9

—

"I told you to stay the hell away from her, didn't I?"

The words barely left his mouth before his fist collided with the other boy's gut. The boy gasped, body folding from the impact, just in time for another fist to smash into his face and send him crashing to the cold, hard floor.

Books and papers flew everywhere, skidding along the ground. Their clatter was met with a few snickers from the watching students.

But the boy remained indifferent, as if he were accustomed to this treatment, and began to gather the scattered items from the ground.

Cole hovered above him, still fuming. "What, you think this is a joke?" he snapped, cracking his knuckles. "You deaf or just stupid?"

Grabbing a fistful of the boy's messy black hair, he yanked his head back, forcing him to look up. Then, without hesitation, he drove his fist into his face. A few drops of blood splattered onto the floor.

The boy went still. His shoulders gave a small twitch. His dull, dark brown eyes flicked toward the blood—then... nothing. Just a slow breath, as if the whole thing was no more than a mild annoyance.

He wiped the blood from his lip with the back of his hand, barely glancing up. "I thought you 'genetic salads' were supposed to be stronger," he muttered, voice calm and flat — almost bored — as he went back to gathering his scattered belongings.

"What the hell did you just say?" Cole demanded, stunned.

"I said," the boy replied, still not looking at him, "even my pure-blood little sister hits harder than you, moron."

"You little—" Cole's voice cracked with fury.

No begging, no panic—just calm, biting insults.

His fists hadn't broken him. His threats had fallen flat. And now this reject had the nerve to mock him?

No one had ever spoken to him like that before—especially not some dirt-blood nobody. The humiliation twisted in his gut, feeding the fire of his wounded pride.

Grinding his teeth, hands trembling with fury, he lifted his foot, ready to slam it down on the boy's head and finish it.

Just then, a voice broke the tension.

"Hey, Cole. That's enough," one of his buddies said, stepping forward with a nervous glance. "He's had it."

"Yeah man, chill," someone else muttered, shifting uncomfortably. "Sure, he's a freak—but he's also Victor's close friend. Keep pushing, and we're the ones who'll end up in deep shit."

Cole paused, his foot still raised mid-air. His jaw clenched, frustration boiling in his eyes. But the warning sank in. With a grunt, he slowly let his foot fall to the ground and backed off, giving the freak one last glare.

"Let's go," he muttered and turned away.

The others followed, a couple throwing uneasy glances back as they trailed after him. And just like that, the hallway emptied, leaving only silence and a mess of scattered pages behind.

The boy didn't move for a moment. Then, slowly, he gathered the last of his belongings and stood.

"Guess no one taught them to never mess with the quiet guy at school," he chuckled—only to wince as a sharp sting shot through his lip. He brought a hand to his mouth and felt the blood.

For a second, he stared at the red smudge on his fingers. Something about the color... it was oddly soothing.

He brushed his hand across his mouth, tasting the faint iron as he exhaled. "Doesn't hit the same anymore," he murmured. "Might be time to pick up a new hobby."

And without another word, he turned and walked off as if none of it had happened.

He had barely taken a few steps when a loud, familiar voice called out.

"Hey, Adyr!"

Turning his head, he spotted the source—another student, barely a meal away from being called skinny. The boy was already striding toward him, his pace quick and unburdened, a wide, foolish grin plastered across his face.

"Yo, Victor. Thought you'd already gone home," Adyr said, a faint, perfectly fake smirk tugging at his busted lips.

"Nah, class ended a while ago," came the response, the guy looking him over with a casual gaze. When his eyes landed on the cut, he grinned wider. "Damn, man. Got your ass kicked again? That's what you get for messing with the queen of the school, huh?" He slapped Adyr's shoulder, chuckling.

Adyr shrugged, not missing a beat. "Told you, it's not like that. I'm just helping her with piano lessons," he replied, trying to sound as uninterested as possible. He acted like the rumors didn't bother him, but deep down, he knew exactly what he was doing—he thrived on the attention, especially the kind that came from the bullies.

He wasn't a masochist who enjoyed being beaten, but the pain was a method, a way to keep his addiction at bay. Since his reincarnation on this parallel Earth 18 years ago, he'd promised himself he wouldn't take any lives. Yet, that promise left a gnawing emptiness inside him, one he still had to manage.

Breaking an addiction was never easy.

"Yeah, yeah, whatever," Victor said dismissively, waving off Adyr's response. He leaned in closer, dropping his voice to a conspiratorial whisper. "Maybe next time, teach her something with wind instruments. Who knows? Maybe she's better at... blowing?" He chuckled, clearly pleased with himself.

Adyr didn't even spare him a glance as he sighed, his voice laced with annoyance. "One day, that sense of humor of yours is going to get you killed, Victor."

Victor paused, but only for a beat, before scoffing. "Hey, come on, what kind of joke is that? Don't start pulling death flags on me, man. I've got plenty of years left." His steps matched Adyr's as they walked side by side.

"Anyway," Victor continued, his tone taking on a slightly more serious edge, "I came looking for you for a reason. The game releases tonight. You didn't forget, did you?"

The first virtual reality game to emerge since World War.

It had started as nothing more than a rumor, whispered across local internet forums and news reports a decade ago.

At first, most dismissed it—why would a world still recovering from an apocalypse waste resources on a game? But as time passed, the whispers grew louder.

The turning point came a few years ago when the 12 city managers confirmed the rumors and announced their direct involvement in the project. From that moment, the game wasn't just a rumor—it was a phenomenon that everyone was desperate to be part of.

"Yeah, I know," Adyr said, his voice flat as he continued walking without breaking pace, his lack of enthusiasm palpable. "Not interested."

Victor froze for a moment, caught completely off guard. "Wha—? What the hell did you just say?" He blurted out, rushing to keep up. The idea of playing without his best friend hadn't even crossed his mind. Especially not this game—something that was shaping up to be bigger than anything before it.

Victor hesitated for a second, uncertainty flickering across his face. Then, as if making up his mind, he grabbed Adyr's arm, stopping him in his tracks. His usual playful expression faded, replaced by something far more serious.

"There's something else you need to know," he said quietly, his voice dropping. He paused again, weighing his words before leaning in.

"My father told me... the game is using the latest genetic mutation research."

Adyr glanced at Victor with a spark of curiosity.

Genetic mutation has been the hottest topic of the past century.

It wasn't just a solution for most human ailments—from minor illnesses to terminal diseases like cancer—it also offered a means to vastly extend one's lifespan and unlock physical abilities far surpassing the limits of ordinary humans.

However, like all fateful gifts, it came with a catch: only the wealthy, the influential, and their families had access to it. Either that, or elite military personnel—those handpicked and sworn to protect the city from external threats.

'Is this some kind of joke?' Adyr thought, his brow furrowing. 'They're just handing out something like this to the public? It's too good to be true...' He was about to ask Victor if he was really saying all of this—if his father's words even held any weight—when the reason he had gotten close to Victor resurfaced in his mind.

His father.

Henry Bates...

Minister of Defense of Shelter City 9. The most powerful man in the city, second only to the City Manager himself, with complete control over the mutant army known as the Superhuman Task Force.

Anything that came from this man's mouth wouldn't be some casual remark.

Chapter 3 - A Tragic Past (Part 1)

"So, I've got your attention now, right?" Victor asked, a smirk tugging at the corners of his lips. He had just spilled information that wasn't meant to be shared, confident it would be enough to break through his friend's indifference.

But to his surprise, the walls of indifference were thicker than he had anticipated.

"Still not playing," Adyr replied.

Victor stared at him, eyes wide with disbelief, like he'd just been personally offended. "Okay... okay... Just tell me why," he said, his voice a mix of confusion and hurt. This game might've been his only shot at finally getting a genetic mutation. So whatever his reason was—it better be a damn good one.

Adyr sighed. "Do you know how much the game helmet costs?"

Victor thought for a moment before answering. "I don't know... 15,000?" Like every rich kid, he was clueless when it came to price tags.

Adyr let out a slow, tired breath at the response. Victor's complete lack of basic awareness never failed to unsettle him. "It's 7,199 credits," he said flatly.

Victor shrugged, completely unfazed. "Oh, cheaper than I thought," he said, that same clueless grin still stuck on his face.

Adyr's thoughts turned cold for a moment. *This guy might just end up being my first victim in this life.* He forced a smile. "It's not cheap. Not even close. Do you know what a low-class family earns in a month? Mine, for example?"

Before the idiot could throw out another clueless guess, Adyr cut him off. His voice sharpened, each word landing with weight.

"My mom's the only one working. She makes 600 credits a month—that's actually considered decent where we come from. I get 100 from the university as a scholarship. That puts us at 700."

He paused just long enough for it to sink in.

"Now imagine we don't spend a single credit. No food, no rent, no electricity—nothing. We'd still need to save for over ten months just to afford one helmet."

As Adyr spoke, his eyes naturally tracked the subtle shifts in Victor's expression. First, a slight twitch beneath his eye. Then, the tightening of his jaw as he began to grit his teeth.

And finally, in a tone sharper than usual, Victor snapped, "You jerk."

Without another word, he spun around and stormed off—his steps quick and heavy, each one louder than the last.

Apparently, he was angry about something, but Adyr didn't seem even slightly bothered. He completely ignored him and glanced down at his wristwatch, noticing the hour hand resting on five and the minute hand pointing to one.

"Huh. Better not miss the bus," he muttered, then turned and continued walking quickly.

It took him five minutes to leave the faculty building.

As soon as Adyr stepped outside, he felt the change. The warm, filtered air inside gave way to the harsh, unfiltered reality of the world beyond. Though it was summer, the air felt unnaturally cool, not refreshing, but dry and metallic, each breath leaving a faint sting in his throat.

Overhead, thick yellowish clouds blanketed the sky, casting a sickly hue over the campus. They hung low and heavy, like a warning. Rain was coming—the kind that didn't just soak through your clothes, but irritated your skin and left behind a lingering chemical scent.

He pulled out a cheap cloth mask and slipped it on, then adjusted a pair of worn plastic goggles over his eyes. The air wasn't deadly on contact, but staying in it too long left your throat burning and your skin itching in patches you couldn't scratch.

It took him about twenty minutes to reach the bus stop at the edge of campus.

Just in time.

A bit of relief slipped through. Due to the Resource Conservation Act, there were only two buses a day—the first in the morning, and this one. If he missed it, he'd be stuck walking the three-hour route home, possibly under contaminated rain.

Even for someone like Adyr, that would've been an unpleasant idea.

As he approached, he spotted a small group of students standing near the stop, their posture slouched with the weight of the day. He walked up without a word, quietly observing.

Like him, they wore cheap cloth masks and basic goggles to shield their eyes. Unlike the wealthy students with gene-enhanced skin, the commons like them had to protect what little nature had given them.

Their uniforms were faded, their colors washed out, and edges fraying—a silent but clear sign of where they came from.

They were his kind—the poor, the unmodified. Each of them had earned their place at the only university in Shelter City 9 through raw talent and determination, yet they remained the quiet one percent no one ever mentioned.

Not long after, the bus quietly pulled up to the stop. Adyr was the last to step inside. He took the first empty seat he found, not caring about comfort or space. In a world like this, just being able to ride a vehicle was already a luxury in itself.

After a short ride, the bus turned onto a wide street lined with rows of two-story buildings on each side. Though the houses were small and dull—painted in nothing but shades of gray—they were still considered one of the better residential areas in the city.

Soon after, Adyr got off the bus and walked up to the door of one of the houses. He glanced at his wristwatch—just a few minutes past six—then pulled out his keys and unlocked the door.

A wave of warm air mixed with the scent of cooked tomatoes greeted him. A familiar, cheerful voice followed right after. "Welcome back, brother!"

Adyr looked up and saw a smiling head pop out from the kitchen doorway. "Hey, Niva. What's for dinner? Smells good."

She was only a year younger than Adyr, with short, shoulder-length hair as dark as night. Unlike her brother, her eyes were a striking light blue, creating a sharp contrast against her fair skin.

"Tomato soup," she replied with a mischievous grin. Realizing the subtle frown that appeared on her brother's face, she added, "I know you don't like it, but it's the end of the month... It's the only thing we have left."

She disappeared back into the kitchen, only to return a second later with a concerned look. "Did you get into a fight again?" She asked, eyes narrowing as they scanned his face.

"No?" Adyr answered, slipping off his shoes. "I just... slipped and fell."

Niva wasn't buying it. "Brother, that's the second time this week. If the bullies get too annoying, just tell them your sister's more than happy to kick their asses." She flexed her thin, bony arms in mock threat.

To her, with no father figure around, her brother had always been the smartest and coolest person in the world. She couldn't imagine a scenario where he wasn't in control, so she brushed it off with a lighthearted joke.

Adyr chuckled. "Yeah, I told them that. You know what? They actually backed off." Then, a bit more seriously, he added, "Just don't tell Marielle, alright? No need to make her worry."

Niva giggled. "Alright. Just leave your clothes in the bathroom—I'll get them washed before she gets back."

"You're the best," Adyr said with a thumbs-up before heading upstairs, where his room and the bathroom were located.

He changed out of his clothes, tossed his uniform into the laundry bag, and grabbed a wet tissue to wipe himself down.

He glanced at his reflection, checking for any visible signs of the beating. Only a faint bruise had surfaced on his pale, sickly skin.

Once he was finished, he checked the time. 6:28. Time to head downstairs.

The table was already set for him—one bowl of tomato soup, a small piece of bread, and a few pickles on the side—just a single serving.

It was clear that Niva had already eaten, and their mother hadn't returned from work yet.

"Brother, clean up the table and handle the dishes after you eat, okay? I'm heading upstairs to do the laundry," Niva called out as she made her way up.

"Alright," Adyr replied, easing himself into the chair.

He stared at the bowl in front of him. The soup looked redder than usual—so vivid he could almost swear it was brighter than any other day.

His empty stomach and the low grumbling from within were enough to push him into motion. He picked up the spoon and dipped it into the soup.

That's when it started.

"Not this crap again," he muttered, as a cold sweat crept across his forehead.

Plop.

His unfocused gaze flickered, landing on two round shapes rising in the soup—side by side, unmoving.

Too round.

Too familiar.

Chapter 4 - A Tragic Past (Part 2)

Adyr stared into the tomato soup— and the soup stared back.

Two round shapes floated on the surface, still and watching.

Soon, everything began to shift.

His vision tinted red, slowly bleeding over the room until everything matched the color of the soup.

He felt it.

He knew what was coming.

The inevitable. But it was already too late.

Then came the voice.

"Son."

Flat. Cold. Distant.

It echoed—not from the room, but from somewhere far closer.

"Stop," Adyr blurted out, his voice shaking. But the voice didn't stop.

"Son."

Instinctively, he shut his eyes tight. Darkness had always been his sanctuary.

But even there, it found him. "Son. Eat your meal. We wouldn't want your sister to go to waste... would we?"

His eyes flew open, desperate to escape. But light only brought the vision with it.

He saw the face. She was young, with long blond hair.

She stared at him with hollow, empty sockets where her eyes used to be.

Tears, thick and red, streamed down her pale cheeks.

Then her lips, almost colorless, parted.

"Brother."

And just like that, it was gone.

The red faded.

The dead face vanished.

In its place was Niva, her expression tight with worry, her voice gentle. "Brother? Are you okay?"

Adyr looked at her with unfocused eyes, trying to convince himself that he was truly back, that the childhood trauma had passed.

"I'm..." He tried to speak, but his breathing was still too erratic. "...fine."

"I'm sorry," Niva said softly, her voice full of concern as she wrapped her arms around him in a tight hug, offering what little comfort she could. "I didn't know the trauma was still there."

Of course, the trauma she meant wasn't the real one—from his dark past life—but the one he had carefully fabricated in this world.

After being reincarnated, Adyr was found as a baby outside the city walls and brought to the city orphanage. He lived there for eight years before Marielle, who worked at the orphanage, adopted him into her home.

And whenever someone asked about his odd behaviors—like why he couldn't stand soup—he always pointed to the orphanage and its awful kitchen staff.

"It's okay. It's not your fault," Adyr said quietly, letting his sister comfort him.

"I'll make you something else. You don't have to eat this," Niva replied quickly, grabbing the bowl of soup and hurrying back into the kitchen.

It's been happening more often... And this time, I almost didn't come back, Adyr thought, gently setting down the spoon he'd been gripping tightly. A faint smear of blood marked the handle and his fingers. That sharp sting, subtle but grounding, had snapped him back just in time.

Pain, as always, was the only thing strong enough to anchor him to reality.

He grabbed a napkin and wiped the blood away just as Niva returned with a plate in her hands.

"We still had some canned salami, so I made you a sandwich. Is that okay?" Niva asked softly, concern lacing her voice.

"It's perfect. Thanks," he replied with a small, tired smile, raising the sandwich to take a bite—only to be interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Is that Marielle?" He asked, lowering the sandwich slightly.

"I don't think it's Mom. She said she'd be working late," Niva said, already heading toward the hallway. "I'll get it. You go ahead and eat."

Shortly after, Niva returned with a large box in her arms, a puzzled and surprised look on her face.

"This came for you," she said, setting it on the table.

The box wasn't particularly heavy, but it was definitely large. That wasn't what surprised her, though. In the city, all deliveries went through a single logistics agency, and their services weren't cheap. Whoever sent this had to have money to spare.

"Do you know what it is? Who sent it?" She asked eagerly, inching closer, clearly hoping her brother would open it right away.

Adyr stood and calmly began unboxing the package, showing no hint of surprise, almost like he'd been expecting it all along. As he lifted the flaps, a small note sat neatly on top, waiting to be read.

"YOU JERK."

He exhaled softly through his nose—a sound caught between a sigh and a smirk.

"It's from a friend," he said casually.

Niva leaned in, eyes wide with curiosity.

As he pulled back the last flap and revealed what was inside, she let out a sharp gasp.

"Wait... is that a game helmet?!"

Like everyone else across all twelve cities, Niva had also heard the buzz about the upcoming VRMMO. But beyond all the excitement, what stuck with her most was how expensive the gear was—and this was no small gift.

"I can't wait to pass the entrance exams and start making rich friends like you," Niva sighed dramatically.

She also wanted to play the game—who didn't? But according to the online forums, once a game helmet was activated, it synced to the user's brainwaves and couldn't be used by anyone else. So borrowing her brother's wasn't an option.

As she mulled it over, turning the thought into fuel for her study motivation, a sudden knock at the door snapped her out of it.

"Now, who could that be?" She mumbled, blinking away the daydream.

She went to the door again and returned with another box—this one even bigger, balanced carefully in her arms.

"Let me guess. Another rich friend?" She said with a raised eyebrow.

"I guess?" Adyr replied, his tone uncertain. Unlike before, he hadn't been expecting this one.

As he opened the box, the first thing that greeted him was a cake sealed inside a clear container. It was covered in a rich red glaze and decorated with what looked like fresh, glossy cherries.

"Ahhhh! Is that a cake?! Are those cherries? Sour cherries?!" Niva squealed like a fangirl, her eyes lighting up. She looked even more excited than when she saw the game helmet earlier—and honestly, who could blame her? A cake with fresh fruit on top was the kind of luxury someone in her shoes might only taste once, maybe twice a year if she was lucky.

She quickly lifted the cake out of the box, and beneath it sat another game helmet... along with a note.

Unlike Victor's sloppy one, this note was written on eye-catching pink paper with a faint, sweet aroma clinging to it. The handwriting was elegant and deliberate—clearly someone had put effort into it.

A small gesture to show my gratitude. I hope you'll accept it. And at the bottom, like a signature, was the name: *Selina White*.

"Selina White?" Niva forcefully tore her eyes away from the cake, squinting at the name on the note. "Why does that sound familiar?" She muttered, thinking out loud. A second later, recognition hit her. "Wait—what?! No way. That's her?!"

"You know her?" Adyr asked, genuinely curious.

Niva spun around, looking at him like he'd just asked if water was wet. "What do you mean do I know her? Of course I do! Everyone my age knows who Selina White is."

She began counting on her fingers, her voice buzzing with excitement.

"She was ranked number one in Young Influentials Monthly, super famous for her charity work—especially with orphans—crazy smart, and I mean, come on, have you seen her? She's absolutely gorgeous."

Then her tone shifted, a bit more serious. "And her mom? Chairwoman of the Angel Wing Foundation. Also happens to own the orphanage where our mom works." She paused, a doubtful look crossing her face as she asked.

"...Brother. Are you seriously dating our mom's boss's daughter?"

"I'm just helping her with her piano lessons," Adyr replied casually as he slowly lifted the game helmet out of the box.

"Piano lessons? Since when do you know how to play piano?" Niva asked suspiciously, raising an eyebrow. But before she could press further, Adyr cut in.

"It's for you," he said, holding the helmet out toward her.

For a moment, Niva stared at the sleek, gray device in his hands—its design almost like a motorcycle helmet, only without the visor.

Adyr watched her face shift through a dozen expressions, as if she were arguing with herself internally. Finally, she spoke.

"I think you should send it back," she said softly. "It's way too expensive. I can't accept something like that." Then, after a short pause, she added, "And with the entrance exams just two months away, I don't want to get distracted by a game."

"That's a smart call," Adyr replied with a smile, placing the helmet back in the box. He reached for the cake next, intending to return it too, only to be stopped by her hand, firm and unyielding.

"Leave the cake," Niva said, her voice steady and her expression uncharacteristically serious.

It was clear the cake was staying.

Chapter 5 - Choose Your Path

6:50 PM

After finishing his meal and cleaning up the dishes, Adyr returned to his room. It was a small space—just enough for a single bed, a wardrobe, and a modest desk.

On the desk sat a battered laptop gifted by his university, two half-melted candles, and the game helmet Selina had sent him, now carefully packed back into its box, waiting to be returned.

For a teenage boy, the room was almost unnaturally simple, tidy, and clean.

He sat on the edge of his bed, holding the other helmet—the one Victor had sent—and glanced at the time.

"Ten minutes until the power cut... and the game launch," he muttered.

In low-income districts like theirs, scheduled blackouts were common—a measure enforced by the city to conserve energy. Still, the fact that the launch of the most anticipated game in decades coincided with one of these outages felt... off.

He picked up the instruction manual resting next to him and flipped through it. There wasn't a single word about the game itself—just technical data and safety guidelines.

Following the instructions, he powered up the device.

A small digital display lit up near the base of the helmet, reading: 100%. According to the manual, that meant the internal battery was fully charged, enough for approximately three hours of use.

It meant that after three hours of gameplay, he'd have to wait until morning for the electricity to return, just to recharge the helmet if he wanted to keep playing.

Such was one of the many inconveniences of being poor in a world still recovering from an apocalypse.

Adyr lit the candles first, then placed the game helmet on his head and waited.

Everything was pitch black, except for a green neon countdown pulsing at the center of his view.

He waited quietly as the numbers ticked down.

3...

2...

1...

The moment the countdown hit zero, a sudden pull gripped his entire being. Everything went dark, and for a few seconds, all sensation vanished.

It wasn't just a visual blackout—he could feel his entire body being transported somewhere else, as if space itself had shifted around him.

For a split second, he thought about removing the helmet and checking what was going on, but just then, his vision and senses came rushing back.

"This..." Adyr murmured in disbelief.

His body was suspended high in the sky, still clad in the familiar pajamas he always wore to sleep, soaring weightlessly as he looked down at the vast, breathtaking world stretching out beneath him.

And it wasn't just the visuals that felt real—it was everything.

He could feel the gentle and cold breeze brushing against his skin, the unfamiliar scent of clean, untouched air filling his lungs.

It was too real.

While he was still taking in the moment—watching, feeling, savoring every bit of the surreal scene—glowing green text suddenly appeared before him.

[Choose your path.]

Moments later, more text shimmered into existence, like fireflies drawn toward a distant sun.

[Astra]

- One of the four main Paths, created by the God ***Astrael***.
- He shaped the first solid form from the chaos, giving structure to the formless.
- It represents everything physical.

[Aether]

- One of the four main Paths, created by the Goddess ***Aetheris***.
- She gave inner depth to all that exists, shaping the unseen essence within the seen.
- It represents everything spiritual.

[Ignis]

- One of the four main Paths, created by the God ***Ignivar***.
- He sparked the first motion within creation, awakening both flesh and soul.
- It represents every movement.

[Nether]

- One of the four main Paths, created by the Goddess ***Nethera***.
- As the counterforce to creation, she began the cycle of decay — undoing form so that renewal may begin.
- It represents every destruction and rebirth.

"Oh... this is interesting," Adyr said, his eyes gleaming with curiosity.

In his previous life, gaming had been one of his many hobbies, particularly MMORPGs, and he quite enjoyed them. Based on his experience, he had expected to choose something like a class. But seeing this... it genuinely surprised him.

For the first time in his life—or any life—someone, or something, was asking him to choose his own path. And so, he decided to take his time, floating there in the sky, carefully pondering which path truly suited him and which one he genuinely wanted.

As Adyr hovered in silent contemplation, something unexpected began to unfold.

First came a darkness, rising from nowhere, staining the sky and veiling the world beneath his feet.

Then came the sound—a low, buzzing hum that filled his ears and the space around him, like the distant clash of a thousand instruments colliding into one alien note.

Next was the cracking.

He looked up and saw the sky itself fracture, a jagged tear splitting open with a bone-deep creak.

Almost instinctively, Adyr thought of fleeing—but he quickly remembered he had no control here. He was merely floating, his body bound by an unseen force.

Frozen in anticipation, he watched.

From the widening rift, dozens of brilliant lights surged outward, flooding the world and sky once again with a blinding, ethereal glow.

As they approached, he could see them clearly: letters—radiant, sharp, and pulsing with a presence too vast to comprehend.

The letters drifted downward and arranged themselves above the existing four paths, taking their place at the very top.

While the four original paths remained beneath, glowing grandly in green, this new one was different.

It was made entirely of colorless light, shining not with beauty, but with something beyond magnificence—something absolute.

[Primora]

-The One.

-They longed to exist, and I let them be.

And thus, the fifth path descended upon the world.

Chapter 6 - Talent Recognition

"Is this some kind of glitch, or part of an opening event?" Adyr murmured, thoughtfully sifting through the dazzling events unfolding before him, leaning more toward the latter.

"Whatever," he chuckled, having already decided which path to choose.

He had wanted to choose his own path freely, without any manipulation or outside influence. But this newly revealed path felt far too special—ignoring it would have been nothing short of foolish.

And so, without hesitating any further, he gave his answer.

"I choose Primora."

The moment he spoke, all the existing texts vanished, replaced by new ones flashing before his eyes.

[Analyzing character...]

[Character analysis complete.]

[Generating status panel...]

[Status panel created.]

[Name]: Adyr

[Race]: Human

[Path]: Primora

[Evolution Step]: 0

[Physique]: 2

[Will]: 3

[Resilience]: 3

[Sense]: 2

[Energy]:

10 / 10

[Registered Talents]: 0/5

[Sparks]: Complete your first evolution to unlock.

[Sanctuary]: Complete your first evolution to unlock.

[Free Stat Points]: 0

Adyr skimmed through the newly opened status panel, his mind swirling with thoughts, especially how the system knew his name.

But before he could delve deeper into it, a sudden force yanked at him.

Gravity—absent until now—returned with brutal immediacy. Without warning, Adyr began to plummet, falling from what must have been thousands of meters above the ground.

As he accelerated, the pressure of the air slammed against his body, growing harsher with every passing second. The soft breeze he had barely noticed earlier had transformed into a violent gale, clawing at his skin and tearing at his clothes.

The freezing cold of high altitude bit into him, seeping deep into his flesh, numbing his hands and face. Breathing became a struggle as the rushing air battered his lungs, and his eyes stung from the relentless wind tearing at them.

Fuck... He cursed under his breath, feeling every painful detail of the fall.

The brutal realism of the experience made one chilling thought creep into his mind—*if the senses were this real, would dying feel real too?*

He had died once before.

He knew exactly what it felt like—and it was nothing even remotely close to pleasure.

Still, stubbornly, he kept his eyes open.

He watched as the ground grew larger and larger in his vision, rushing up to meet him.

Despite everything—the pain, the tension, the chaos—he couldn't help but enjoy it.

There was something raw, something breathtakingly beautiful about the fall.

And then came the inevitable—the crash.

THUD!

Adyr blinked in confusion. It wasn't the bone-shattering, flesh-bursting impact he had braced for. Instead, it felt like a mild stumble—no more than tripping and falling onto solid ground.

Slowly, he pushed himself up, first checking his body. Finding no visible wounds or signs of injury, he finally turned his attention to his surroundings.

He quickly realized it was no longer the bright daytime sky he had fallen through. Darkness cloaked the area, and it didn't take him long to notice the jagged stone walls encircling him.

He was inside a cave.

How did I fall here? He thought, frowning as he looked up—only to find solid rock overhead, no hole, no entrance, no explanation for his arrival.

Then something else struck his senses: the smell. A foul mixture of rot, ash, and dampness clung to the air, thick and oppressive.

He glanced down and noticed the ground was coated in a thin layer of black soil.

Faint footprints were scattered across the black soil, so sharp and brittle they could only have been left by bare bone, like the steps of skeletons wandering through the darkness.

"What is this... a skeleton dungeon?" Adyr muttered to himself, drawing on his experience with MMORPGs to make an educated guess.

At that moment, the green text returned to his vision, carrying a new message:

[Talent Recognition: "Observer(Lv1)" confirmed.]

-Talent has been identified based on demonstrated behavior.

-Proceed with registration to the Status Panel?

-Cost: 1 Energy

-Reward: 1 Free Stat Point

Adyr read the system message carefully, running it through his mind before finally saying, "Yes."

Immediately, he felt something invisible within him being siphoned away. The sensation was strange but brief, and once it faded, he found himself wondering how he could view the changes to his status panel.

As if responding to his thoughts, green text appeared in front of him, revealing the updated panel:

[Name]: Adyr

[Race]: Human

[Path]: Primora

[Evolution Step]: 0

[Physique]: 2

[Will]: 3

[Resilience]: 3

[Sense]: 2

[Energy]: 9 / 10

[Registered Talents]: 1/5

[Sparks]: Complete your first evolution to unlock.

[Sanctuary]: Complete your first evolution to unlock.

[Free Stat Points]: 1

He noticed that his **[Energy]** had decreased by one point, while both the **[Registered Talents]** and **[Free Stat Points]** sections had each increased by one.

"So this is how it works," Adyr muttered, a trace of understanding flashing in his eyes.

Rather than granting him a new skill or ability, the system had simply recognized a talent he already possessed—and rewarded him with a free stat point for demonstrating it.

It was obvious that the game's power system revolved around the players' genuine talents.

Before allocating his newly gained free stat point, Adyr noticed the **[Lv.1]** indicator next to the talent and paused, a thought crossing his mind.

He crouched beside one of the skeletal footprints and began examining it more closely. The strange blue crystals embedded in the stone walls cast a faint, natural glow, like a pale moonlight—and he used that dim illumination to aid his inspection.

Short. No taller than a child.

Toes turned slightly inward. Walks hunched over.

Pressure's heavier on the right. Carrying something—sword or short spear. Weight... fifteen, maybe twenty kilos. Light on its feet, but the bones are solid. Not something that'll crumble with a single blow.

As a former human hunter, his tracking and observation skills were exceptional, and after completing his deeper investigation, the system message appeared once again, confirming what he had already suspected.

[Talent Recognition: "Observer (Lv2)" confirmed.]

- Talent has been identified based on further demonstrated behavior.
- Proceed with registration to the Status Panel?
- **Cost:** 10 Energy
- **Reward:** 10 Free Stat Points

Unlike before, the reward wasn't just a single stat point—it was an incredible tenfold increase.

But there was a small problem.

"I don't have enough energy to register it," Adyr muttered, glancing at his **[Energy]** bar and wondering how he could increase it.

He experimented a little but quickly realized he couldn't allocate his free stat point directly into **[Energy]**. At the same time, he wasn't keen on spending it on his other stats either—not before he fully understood what each of them truly represented.

For now, he chose to set the issue aside and focus on exploring the cave around him. With less than three hours of battery life remaining on the helmet, he had no intention of wasting it all on tedious system analysis.

He shifted his attention to a tunnel—the only path leading deeper into the cave—and began moving forward in small, cautious steps.

A faint excitement stirred within him at the thought of meeting his first skeleton victim.

Chapter 7 - Increasing [Physique]

Adyr continued progressing through the narrow corridor, guided by the dim glow of the crystals embedded in the walls, while carefully following the trail of footprints.

The deeper he went, the more numerous the prints became—and among them, a few were fresh, clear signs that he would soon encounter a skeleton.

And soon enough, he did.

At the end of the corridor, he spotted a faint shadow cast against the wall. Something was waiting just around the corner to the left.

Adyr didn't know what sense a skeleton has and how powerful one can be, so he decided to be cautious.

He slowed his steps, softening his movements as much as possible to suppress any sound, creeping forward with silent precision.

When he finally reached the end of the corridor, he saw it— the prey he had been tracking all this time, now in plain sight for the first time.

Compared to Adyr's height of 1.70 meters, it appeared significantly shorter, no more than 1.40 meters tall.

Its skeletal structure differed slightly from that of a normal human: the skull was unusually round, the neck bone was short, causing the head to lean forward, and both the arms and legs were proportionally longer than usual.

In its right hand, it held a broken, half-length spear.

Despite the bones appearing faded and moldy in color, their structure looked surprisingly solid and durable.

I might need a weapon, Adyr thought.

If it were a proper living enemy, he could find a weakness, strike from behind, or choke them into unconsciousness. But this opponent was nothing but bones—and the only way to defeat it was to shatter them.

Unfortunately, the only equipment he had was his pajamas—no shoes on his feet, and not a weapon in sight, not even a large stone he could use as a blunt instrument.

No... there's a weapon I can use, Adyr thought with a faint smile, already plotting his first kill in this game world.

Moving as silently as he could, he crept closer to the skeleton. Like a spider stalking its prey, he closed the distance inch by inch.

When he finally reached striking range—and confirmed the skeleton still hadn't noticed him—he lunged forward, grabbing it from behind by the ribs and yanking backward with all his strength.

Caught off guard, the skeleton couldn't resist the sudden force. It stumbled, lost its balance, and crashed onto its back with a hollow clatter.

Without hesitation, Adyr pressed his foot down hard onto the skeleton's ribcage, pinning it in place. As he did, he quickly snatched up the broken spear that had fallen from its hand.

The spear's tip was old, rusted, and worn, much like the skeleton itself. But beneath the decay, the metallic core still held firm, solid enough to break bone if used properly.

Without wasting a moment, Adyr raised the spear and drove the sharpened tip straight down toward the struggling skeleton's skull.

The weapon struck, but fell short of his expectations. His raw strength wasn't enough, and the spear only left a visible crack across the bone.

Still, the force of the blow stunned the skeleton, leaving it dazed and motionless for half a second, long enough for a second strike.

Crack!

This time, the spear smashed through. The satisfying sound of splitting bone echoed through the air, quickly followed by a series of system messages:

[Talent Recognition: "Tracking(Lv1)" confirmed.]

- Talent has been identified based on following and interpreting environmental traces.

[Talent Recognition: "Stealth(Lv1)" confirmed.]

- Talent has been identified based on silent movement and successful ambush.

[Talent Recognition: "Tactics(Lv1)" confirmed.]

- Talent has been identified based on strategic engagement and enemy control.

- Proceed with registration to the Status Panel?

- **Cost:** 1 Energy per talent

- **Reward:** 1 Free Stat Point per talent

Adyr first made sure the skeleton was truly dead—broken beyond recovery—before turning his attention to the new system messages.

"No loot or experience points?" He muttered, disappointment clear in his voice.

He chose not to register **[Tactics]**, knowing he was limited to only five talents. Since he understood how talent progression worked, he preferred to register only the ones he could advance the easiest later on.

So he spent 2 **[Energy]** to register **[Stealth]** and **[Tracking]**, feeling the same sensation of siphoning some unknown energy within him. At the same time, he earned 2 additional free stat points.

After a bit more thought, he decided to spend 1 free stat point to increase his **[Physique]**.

Just moments ago, he had failed to crack the skeleton's skull with a single blow, clearly due to a lack of strength. Besides, it wasn't hard to guess what **[Physique]** represented, so he decided to upgrade it and personally experience the effects.

The moment he increased the stat, a sudden warmth surged through his body.

His muscles, tendons, and even his internal organs twitched and spasmed in response.

It wasn't painful—just unsettling. But the discomfort faded quickly, replaced by something else.

A rush of strength. It felt almost unreal.

He could sense every fiber of his body tightening, solidifying, filling with a new, unfamiliar power.

Feels good... too good, he muttered under his breath, savoring the strange, addictive rush.

[Physique]: 2 → 3

[Will]: 3

[Resilience]: 3

[Sense]: 2

[Energy]: 7 / 10 → 7 / 11

[Registered Talents]: 3/5

[Sparks]: Complete your first evolution to unlock.

[Sanctuary]: Complete your first evolution to unlock.

[Free Stat Points]:

2

Adyr summoned his status panel to review the changes and immediately noticed something. When his **[Physique]** increased by 1, his maximum **[Energy]** had risen by exactly the same amount.

He had suspected it before, but now he was nearly certain: **[Energy]** wasn't a separate stat of its own—it was the sum of all his other attributes combined.

He glanced back at the motionless skeleton, slowly reaching out to touch its rough, worn bones.

There was no blood to spill, no flesh to tear, no eyes to dim—just a pile of bones. It was almost hard to believe this thing had been moving around just moments ago.

Yet, a strange clarity lingered in Adyr's dark brown eyes.

He had to admit— he kind of enjoyed it.

But still... no loot. He sighed, staring at his only prize: a broken spear.

Not satisfied with just that, he decided to search the remains more thoroughly. And sure enough, tucked deep inside the skull, he found something: a small purple crystal, faintly glowing, embedded directly into the bone.

It was almost fused into the skull. Using the sharp tip of the broken spear, Adyr carefully pried it free.

The crystal was tiny—even smaller than the tip of his little finger—and didn't look particularly valuable.

Yet something about it was... strange.

As he stared at it, a strange hunger stirred within him. For a fleeting moment, the crystal looked almost delicious—irresistible in a way he couldn't explain.

Finding the sensation both bizarre and intriguing, he hesitated for only a second before raising the crystal to his mouth, curious to taste it.

It had no flavor. But the instant his tongue touched it, the hunger intensified. His stomach even let out a faint growl.

"Okay... what's the worst that could happen? It's just a game, right?" Adyr reasoned, shrugging to himself.

Without wasting another thought, he tossed the crystal into his mouth.

He tried to chew it first, but it was far too hard, and before he could resist, an instinctive swallowing reflex kicked in, sending the crystal sliding down into his stomach.

For a moment, he simply waited, curious about what might happen.

Then it hit.

Suddenly, he felt a surge of energy flooding into his body. The sensation was strangely familiar—except this time, it was the opposite of what he had experienced when registering talents.

Back then, energy had been pulled out of him; now, it was pouring in, filling him instead of draining away.

Before he could fully process the sensation, a familiar green system message appeared before him:

[You have consumed an Energy Crystal (Lv.1). Your Energy has increased by 0.1.]

[Energy]: 7 / 11 → 7.1 / 11

Just like that, Adyr had discovered a way to replenish his **[Energy]**.

Chapter 8 - An unexpected surprise

The game had already exceeded Adyr's expectations. The technology behind it was beyond anything he had ever seen—everything felt so real, every sensation almost indistinguishable from reality itself.

But what entertained him the most was the feeling of discovery, like a child rediscovering the world for the first time.

Collect the purple crystals. They're important, he noted, mentally pinning a new reminder in the task room of his memory palace. With that, he continued forward through the dim corridors of the cave.

It wasn't long before he encountered another skeleton along the path. This time, knowing the skeleton's senses were dull and its movements slow, Adyr didn't bother sneaking. Instead, he sprinted straight at it, spear in hand.

The skeleton noticed him, but before it could even lift its broken, rusted sword, Adyr's spear drove straight through its skull, shattering it and dropping the creature in an instant.

The increase in his **[Physique]** stat was immediately evident.

No system message appeared this time. Apparently, the system hadn't detected anything worthy of talent recognition, but Adyr didn't particularly care. If he needed to, he still had plenty of talents he hadn't yet revealed to the system.

Just as he had with the previous skeleton, he began searching the remains. The broken sword was in even worse condition than his spear, so he ignored it.

Finding nothing else of use, he quickly searched for the purple crystal—and found it embedded once again inside the skull.

[You have consumed an Energy Crystal (Lv.1). Your Energy has increased by 0.1.]

[Energy]: 7.1 / 11 → 7.2 / 11

After experiencing the same strange rush of energy, Adyr checked his status panel. At this pace, he calculated, he would need to hunt down another 28 skeletons to gather enough energy to register a Level 2 talent.

But the cave was vast, and the battery of his game helmet was steadily draining. He also didn't want to rush blindly—there could easily be stronger creatures lurking deeper inside, or even hidden traps waiting for the careless. Caution and preparation had always been part of his philosophy.

Maintaining a steady pace, Adyr wandered through the rotting corridors for what he estimated to be nearly two hours.

Relying on his senses, he moved carefully, eliminating every skeleton he encountered as quickly and efficiently as possible.

He wasn't sure whether to call it luck or misfortune, but throughout that time, he hadn't encountered a single trap, a stronger enemy, or even a different type of creature.

It was just the same goblin-like skeletons over and over again.

By the time the repetition began to numb his mind, killing the already dead on repeat, he finally stopped to check his energy.

[Energy]: 9.9 / 11

In total, he had killed 27 more skeletons, and now, he was just one kill away from reaching the 10 **[Energy]** he needed to register his next advancement.

While searching for his next prey, Adyr stepped into a wider corridor. This passage was different from the rough stone corridors he had seen so far. It was clear that an intelligent hand had shaped this place.

On both sides of the hallway, rows of small rooms stretched into the distance, each one sealed off by iron bars. It didn't take long for Adyr to realize he had entered a prison block.

He moved forward carefully, curiosity and caution guiding his steps as he glanced into each cell one by one. Most were empty, aside from layers of filth and thick spiderwebs. Some cell doors were still locked, while others hung open.

Just as Adyr was about to conclude that this was nothing more than an abandoned, forgotten underground prison, he spotted something.

In one of the locked cells, lying curled up in the middle of the filthy floor, was a small figure.

It was a young girl, small and frail, dressed in what must have once been a beautiful white outfit, now torn, dirtied, and stained.

Her long, tangled blonde hair was spread across the dusty ground, her back turned toward him, her knees drawn up against her chest in a protective, fetal position.

He observed carefully and noticed the faint rise and fall of her shoulders—she was breathing.

Alive.

A prisoner? Adyr thought, but the idea didn't sit right with him.

This place didn't look like somewhere where prisoners would be kept. It was old, abandoned, and filled with nothing but mindless skeletons—creatures barely capable of basic movement, let alone organized captivity.

Given that, Adyr decided not to rush. Instead of making any noise that might alert the girl—or anything else nearby—he chose to stay silent and study the scene further, determined to gather as much information as possible before acting.

Fresh footprints... coming from the opposite side of the corridor.

Small. Light. Hers.

Rushed. Panicked.

Running from something—or someone.

The steps are uneven. Pauses here and there. Not tactical—just collapsing from exhaustion.

Her legs give out more than once. She falls. But every time, she forces herself back up.

Final steps... staggering. Barely holding together.

She stumbles into the cell, pulls the door shut—a move born of pure desperation.

No strategy. No plan. Just survival instinct.

Adyr stopped in front of the closed cell door, hand resting lightly on the rusted bars.

The door didn't just shut. It locked—or rust-welded itself shut.

Trapped.

Two days, maybe three. No food. No way out.

Waiting. Fading.

"Hey," Adyr called out softly, watching the slight tremble in the girl's shoulders as she reacted to his voice.

Slowly, she stirred, struggling to push herself upright. She turned her head toward him, her wide eyes filled with fear, confusion, and something else. *Hope.*

But she wasn't the only one surprised.

The moment Adyr got a clear look at her face, he felt a flicker of shock himself. She wasn't a little girl, not like he had assumed.

Her features were more refined, resembling those of a young woman, probably somewhere in her twenties. And she wasn't entirely human either.

Her ears were slightly elongated and tapered to a point, her nose was small and delicate, and her large, ice-blue eyes gave her the look of a porcelain doll—fragile, otherworldly.

She opened her mouth to speak, but closed it again, like she had forgotten how to form the words.

Adyr didn't interrupt. He simply waited, patient and still.

Her lips quivered. She tried once more.

"You..." she finally whispered, her voice fragile and uncertain. "You look tall."

Another jolt of shock ran through Adyr— but it wasn't because of how sweet her voice sounded, or how absurd her choice of words was.

It was the language she spoke.

A language that, as far as Adyr knew, had never existed in the history of the world he had been reincarnated into.

Chapter 9 - Helping Vesha

How can she speak Latin? Adyr felt the conflict stir within him.

In the Twelve Cities, only a single language was spoken—and it wasn't anything remotely close to Latin.

Also, throughout all the history classes he had attended at the university, he had never once encountered a language that even remotely resembled those from his old world.

Sure, countless tongues were spoken across this world—endless dialects and accents—but every single one was utterly alien to him, none bearing even the faintest trace of the languages he once knew.

Also, it couldn't just be a coincidence, could it? They had wanted to create a new language for the game, and somehow ended up creating Latin? It was simply not believable.

While Adyr's thoughts surged, the girl seemed to realize that her choice of words had sounded absurd, and she quickly spoke again.

"Um... sorry," she said, hoping to clear up any misunderstanding. After a brief pause, she added, "Can I ask... who are you?"

As Adyr heard more of her speech, his certainty grew—she was speaking Latin.

"I'm Adyr. Just a player," he replied in Latin as well.

He was fluent in Latin; it was one of the many languages he had picked up in his previous world.

Due to his former profession, he had moved through countless countries, adopting new identities as easily as changing clothes. One of those identities—requiring him to blend into a very specific environment—had forced him to learn Latin.

[Talent Recognition: "Linguistic (Lv1)" confirmed.]

-Talent has been identified based on fluent adaptation to foreign speech.

-Proceed with registration to the Status Panel?

-Cost:

1 Energy

-Reward: 1 Free Stat Point

Adyr saw the system message acknowledging the talent, but he chose to ignore it for now, intending to reserve his energy to upgrade **[Observer]** to Level 2 later.

"Player?" the girl asked, tilting her head in confusion. There was also a hint of worry on her face, as she wasn't sure whether this so-called player was a friend or a foe, whatever the word even meant to her.

It was exactly the reaction Adyr had anticipated. He had only said it out of curiosity—to see how an NPC might respond if he identified himself as a player.

Choosing to ignore both her confusion and her question, he crouched down to bring himself to her eye level, making his posture less intimidating. Then, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, he casually threw out his own question instead.

"What's your name?" He asked, keeping his tone light, just enough to ease her tension and nudge the conversation forward.

The girl stared at his face for a full second, then forced herself to sit up straighter. She shifted onto her knees, adjusting her posture to appear less haggard and shameful before finally speaking.

"It's Vesha," she said, pausing briefly before continuing, her voice steadier than before. "Vesha Draven. Citizen of the Velari Kingdom, youngest daughter of Lord Orven Draven. Follower of Astra, and believer in the god Astraesus."

Adyr raised an eyebrow, faintly amused.

She had offered far more information than he asked for—not out of innocence, but careful calculation.

She understood her situation well: a lone, vulnerable figure trapped in a crumbling prison. By revealing her identity and status, she wasn't just answering—she was positioning herself, trying to appear valuable rather than expendable.

Quite the subtle thought — especially for an artificial intelligence.

And without waiting long, she openly stated her true purpose. "Can you help me escape? My father will make sure you are properly rewarded for it."

"It's locked," Adyr said, pointing at the prison door with a slight glance.

"You're tall," the girl added quickly, then clarified, "You're even taller than the royal guards of the kingdom. You must be strong."

Hearing her reasoning, Adyr chuckled quietly. He had just uncovered another piece of useful information.

It was now obvious that Vesha wasn't human—at least, not fully. Her race's average height was likely shorter than humans', and she had mistakenly assumed he was one of her own.

"Why are you here?" Adyr asked, once again ignoring her question and plea.

A brief flash of disappointment crossed her eyes, but she quickly masked it and said, "I wanted to find the Spark."

Spark? He quickly glanced at his status panel and saw a section labeled **[Sparks]**.

Not wanting to expose his lack of knowledge—or seem even stranger than he already did—he decided against asking directly.

"And were you able to find it?" He asked instead.

Vesha hesitated, wondering for a moment if he was mocking her, but answered politely nonetheless. "The six guards who accompanied me died while helping me escape a skeleton ambush. I didn't even get the chance to see the Spark."

As she spoke, her eyes grew red and wet, guilt clouding her expression. But she was a strong woman—or at least she believed herself to be—and she held the tears back, refusing to let them fall.

"I see," Adyr said, pretending to share her grief while carefully choosing his next words.

But before he could ask another question to gather more information, a sound echoed from the end of the corridor.

"They're here," Vesha blurted out, panic flashing in her eyes. The monsters responsible for her ruined state had finally found her.

Frozen in fear and panic, her eyes drifted to the tall man—her only hope for survival. She watched him slowly rise to his full height, once again mesmerized by how tall he was.

But then, she noticed something she had overlooked until now.

The man was wearing strange, unfashionable clothes made of thin fabric, clearly not designed for defense. To make matters worse, he was barefoot and armed with nothing but a broken, rusty spear.

I'm going to die here. The grim reality struck her like a truck.

Even if he somehow manages to open the prison door and free her, then what? They were still trapped inside the dungeon.

Sure, he was tall—maybe strong enough to take down one or two skeletons—but there were many lurking in these halls.

The fragile hope that had briefly taken root inside her quickly crumbled as she watched him calmly walk toward the oncoming skeleton.

She waited tensely, listening as the sharp clash of weapons and the cracking of bone echoed down the corridor, and then—silence.

Relief washed over her; at least it had only been one skeleton, and the man had dealt with it easily enough.

But that changed nothing. One dead skeleton wouldn't stop what was coming. More would arrive sooner or later.

As she sat there, letting despair creep back in, she heard his footsteps approaching—and then his voice.

"Stay back."

She lifted her head, puzzled, and saw him toss a small purple crystal into his mouth.

"Wha—what are you doing?" She gasped in shock, staring at him as if he had lost his mind.

Adyr noticed her sudden outburst, silently noting that she seemed familiar with energy crystals, but chose to ignore it for now.

He simply repeated, "Back."

This time, it didn't sound like a request—it was an order, one delivered with a quiet authority that left no room for argument.

Instinctively, Vessa drew on a scrap of strength she hadn't realized she still possessed. She pushed herself back, pressing against the wall and putting as much distance as she could between herself and the cell's iron bars.

Meanwhile, Adyr was busy with his character panel. He checked the previous logs and found the **[Observer (Lv2)]** talent registration.

[Talent Recognition: "Observer (Lv2)" confirmed.]

- Talent has been identified based on further demonstrated behavior.
- Proceed with registration to the Status Panel?
- **Cost:** 10 Energy
- **Reward:** 10 Free Stat Points

He confirmed it internally and immediately felt the familiar draining sensation as his energy was consumed.

Now, with 12 free stat points at his disposal, he allocated 7 of them to his **[Physique]** stat.

This should be enough to break the cell door now, he thought, feeling a surge of raw power coursing through every fiber of his body.

Chapter 10 - Genetic Mutation

Adyr...

Vesha repeated the name in her mind several times, as if trying to remember something.

At first, she had assumed he was just another adventurer—someone who had come to the cave seeking quick fortune, one of those who would do anything for the right amount of cash.

She knew that, by nature, adventurers were cunning and skilled, and she had hoped that maybe, just maybe, he would find a way to open the cell gate. Maybe he even knew a safe route out of the cave.

Those were her only hopes in this desperate situation.

No more, no less.

Until—

She saw the purple crystal.

She watched him swallow it casually, as if it were nothing more than candy.

And what shocked her most: he remained completely fine afterward. Someone is consuming an energy crystal and surviving without so much as a twitch.

Vesha could think of only one possibility. *He is a practitioner.*

The realization struck her like a bolt of lightning. Her heartbeat quickened, her head swam, and for a moment her vision darkened—everything blurring except for one vivid figure moving in front of her.

Adyr.

Standing in front of the cell door with an expressionless face.

He stood there, still and silent. Waiting. Calculating.

Then, with a speed Vesha's eyes couldn't even follow, he kicked the door.

BANG!

The sound exploded through the cell—loud, brutal, enough to send dust billowing into the air. The entire room trembled, and chunks of ancient stone crumbled from the walls.

Startled, Vesha squeezed her eyes shut.

When she opened them again, the door was still standing, but she could see the difference. The frame around the lock was dented inward, almost crushed.

BANG!

A second kick, even more powerful than the first. Rust and dust rained down, forcing Vesha to cover her face, her heart hammering in her chest.

BANG!

Came the third impact—and then a heavier sound, a groaning metallic screech as the door finally gave way and crashed inward.

Vesha's small body, still curled against the corner of the wall, trembled—but this time not from fear.

It was excitement.

It wasn't just the thrill of believing she might finally escape this dungeon with him by her side. It was the shock of realizing she was in front of one of those legendary figures — someone she had only glimpsed a handful of times in her life, even with her status, and otherwise knew only through the stories written in books.

She slowly pulled her hands away from her eyes, forcing them open to finally see the heroic figure standing before her. But instead of the sight she had imagined, reality struck her with the exact opposite.

"Wha...?"

Adyr was lying face down in front of the prison gate, completely motionless.

"A-Are you okay?" Vesha called out, her voice unsteady as she dragged herself toward him. But he remained still, offering no response.

As panic tightened its grip on her, she heard a new sound rising from the far end of the corridor — the rattling of bones drawing closer.

The skeletons had heard the commotion and were now rushing to the scene.

In his dark, candle-lit room, Adyr slowly sat up on the bed and pulled off the game helmet. The helmet's charge indicator blinked a faint red at 0%.

He had managed to break open the cell door at the very last second.

I wonder if she'll survive, Adyr thought.

He wasn't exactly optimistic. After all, with all the noise he had made, the skeletons would no doubt rush to the scene — and with what little strength Vesha had left in her frail body, her chances of surviving were painfully slim.

Still, he had acted out of selfish curiosity. He wanted to see what kind of choice an NPC — an artificial intelligence — would make in a situation like that. He was trying to understand the decision-making mechanism behind it — something that could be useful for his future interactions.

But there was one critical thing he had overlooked: his own body, lying there, exposed and defenseless.

Unaware of the danger, Adyr got to his feet and glanced at his watch. 7:01 PM. He found the charging cable and plugged it into the helmet, letting it sit in silence, waiting for the power to come back.

As Adyr found nothing better to do, he decided to begin his daily muscle training — but just as he was about to start, a knock came at the door. Assuming it was his sister, he walked over and grabbed the doorknob to open it.

But strangely, with a loud crack, the knob snapped off and stayed in his hand.

What the hell?

Adyr muttered, staring in disbelief at the iron handle that had snapped clean off the old door.

"Brother, what was that?" Niva asked, stepping inside with a curious and confused look after hearing the noise.

"Just the doorknob," Adyr replied quickly, masking his surprise. "It was old and loose — just came off when I pulled it," he added.

"Oh, okay," Niva said, then continued, "I came to borrow your laptop. It's fully charged, right?"

Adyr nodded and pointed. "On the table."

"If you're free, come downstairs and help me study. Also, Mom's back," she added as she walked out.

Adyr only nodded again and closed the door behind her, still staring at the broken handle in his hand.

It wasn't loose, like he claimed. Sure, it was old, but not so fragile that it should have broken under normal pressure.

Don't tell me... The absurd thought hit him, and he quickly tossed the knob onto the table and dropped to the floor to begin his workout.

He skipped his usual stretches and warm-ups and dove straight into the heavy sets.

He lowered himself into a push-up position. Adyr had been consistently training with bodyweight exercises since the age of six, and on a typical day, he could easily knock out around 100 push-ups in a single set.

But today was different.

As he began, he immediately noticed how much easier it felt compared to before. By the time he hit 100, there was no sign of fatigue in his muscles.

He shifted position and continued with one-arm push-ups. Another 100 — still no real effort. Only a faint warmth in his muscles.

Surprised and curious, Adyr tripled his usual workout. He followed push-ups with intense core training like crunches, lower body work like squats, and back and balance drills like reverse planks.

By the time he completed his entire workout schedule, he wasn't even sweating. Not a drop. If he had to guess, his body was now at least six times stronger than before. That only confirmed the absurd thought that had crept into his mind earlier.

"My body really got stronger... Victor was right," Adyr whispered to himself.

The only explanation for such a sudden, miraculous increase in strength was a genetic mutation — and the only thing that could have triggered that... was the game.

But what he couldn't wrap his head around was how. He had previously assumed that the most he could gain from the game was information — knowledge on how to formulate a serum for genetic mutation.

He hadn't even considered the possibility that a game helmet — designed solely to access brain frequencies — could affect something as physical and deeply rooted as his genes.

Normally, genetic mutation requires direct intervention, like an injection. And as far as he knew, brainwave manipulation alone couldn't alter DNA.

A new absurd thought began to take root in his mind. The game wasn't just a technological marvel — it was starting to feel like something out of a fantasy, the work of a mad genius.