

THE END OF LIFE

BIRTHRIGHT

CHAPTER 9

ADMIN ACCESS

HERMAN

“What the hell?” Korban muttered, gazing off into space above his head.

YOU HAVE ENTERED THE MARSHCRYPT GROTTO DUNGEON!!

It was utterly baffling! I’m no fool—I know what a dungeon is. They’re staples in novels and anime, not real life. Yet here we are, wrapped in events that rival any high fantasy tale, with a dungeon materializing before us. And let’s not skirt around the man on the ground’s newfound magic, which, I’ll admit, is pretty damn electrifying—perhaps the only spark of hope in this twisted saga.

“I-I think we should head back,” I stammered, my gaze nervously flitting between the translucent writing and the ominous shadows, all under the pink and blue luminescent hues emanating from the crystal lying on the ground.

The man finally agreed, “Yeah, that’s not a bad idea.” Rising and brushing himself off, he peered toward our original path, his confusion mirroring mine. “Umm... where’s the portal?”

“What?!” I spun around, my eyes wide as I stared at the spot where the portal had once been. My shoulders slumped, despair setting in, as my hands pressed against the now smooth stone wall, finding no trace of the vanished gateway.

My heart sank, heavy dread filling me as I watched the floating message flash with new writing.

DEFEAT THE DUNGEON BOSS TO SECURE YOUR ESCAPE!!

“What the hell!” I cried. “No. No. No!” The words spilled out in a mantra of denial.

Korban rolled his eyes as he reached down to pick up the crystal, its presence offering me a small comfort. Despite this, I was spiraling into a full mental breakdown, everything else slowly fading into background noise as a panic attack took hold. Still, I tried to divert my thoughts from the realization that I was going to die here. *Oh, God, I was going to die!* I continued to attempt to focus on the sparks of lightning surrounding Korban—it wasn’t helping. I started hyperventilating.

“Yo, before we get moving, you should take another swing at this crystal,” he sighed.

I grasped the intent behind his words—his effort to anchor me away from the engulfing panic. My response was a mere nod, acknowledging his strategy to ground me. As I extended my hand to

receive the fist-sized crystal, its substantial weight oddly reassured me. Remarkably, my breathing steadied, my mind drifting from the fear of death to the intriguing object in my grasp. As a scientist, my instinct was to delve into inquiry and hypothesize about the possibilities this crystal presented.

However, before I could embark on any experimental tangents, Korban interjected with a thought, “I’ve been thinking, what if the magic isn’t limited to electricity or lightning, like in my case, but rather, it adapts to someone, like an affinity?” He paused, giving me a moment to consider, then continued, “What resonates with you personally? Perhaps fire for pyromancy, water, or even something as crazy as space or gravity?” His suggestion made my eyes widen in realization and curiosity.

I shut my eyes, shutting out the glow from the crystal, and focused on Korban’s theory about affinities. If his hypothesis held any water, this revelation could drastically shift the tides, offering humanity a fighting chance against the monsters that were invading Earth. Yet, a significant question lingered: What would my affinity be, assuming I had one at all? Simply thinking about lightning yielded no results, and neither did my attempts with the other elements he’d casually mentioned—fire, water, space, and gravity. I felt no connection, no spark.

The question lingered: what magic, if any, would best resonate with me—or, more precisely, with my soul, assuming souls existed. As an astrophysicist, my dreams were woven with stars, new worlds, and their mysteries. My mind lingered on the notion of other worlds, and as I did, I sensed something extraordinary. Power surged within me, and upon opening my eyes, I found Korban staring—not at me, but at the floating rock before me.

I sighed, resigned, “I’m an earth mage.”

That revelation was the exact antithesis of what I aspired to be. As an astrophysicist, earth magic felt ironically grounding. I yearned for the stars, to unravel the cosmos, not to be tethered to the terrestrial, manipulating this world at my whim.

A sound of shuffling came from behind me. Twisting around, a massive beast resembling a minotaur wielding an axe lunged from the shadows. I flinched, stumbling back as the axe came straight for my head. Desperately, I tried to manipulate the floating rock to strike the beast, but it was too late. The axe approached, its blade tip connecting to my face, and in that moment, my entire life flashed before my eyes. There were memories of a painful divorce with a spouse who cheated on me with my brother. My childhood victories include winning first place at the science fair. Then, as everything faded to darkness, I felt something, no, someone soothing me, as if a goddess was comforting me with her tears, before all gave way to nothingness.

ZOE

I woke up freaking out, with tears and sweat all over my face. I’d dozed off in the back of the car, and now the heat was cranking up. Ray was messing with the fuel pumps at the boats, grabbing some gas, and luckily, no one was around to hassle him. Mara was chilling on the hood, just staring out at the water. That dream hit me hard; it was so real, with Dad fighting a minotaur with magic

in this dark, stony place, and some guy I didn't even know was there, too. Then, the guy gets an axe to the face, and I could swear I felt it. But I kept telling myself, it's just a nightmare, all just a nightmare.

Closing my eyes, I took a few calming breaths and then opened them again, freezing at the sight before me. It looked like an old-school computer screen floating in mid-air. I reached out, trying to tap it, but my hand went right through. I glanced around, half-expecting someone else to confirm this craziness or see if I'd lost it, but it was just me. Well, there was Mara, who was still zoned out on the car's hood, oblivious to my freak-out.

```
Titan<R> Leveling to Ascension 83
      <C>Copyright Primordial of Life 0000-Eternity.

C:\Ascension>run Admin.lta
USER:\Admin>Login_
System Access Granted.

Character Profile Management:
1. Choose Profile           [CCP]
2. Add Profile              [ACP]
3. Delete Profile          [DCP]

C:\Ascension>_
```

“What the,” I breathed out, my confusion escalating. I reached up, tapping the translucent screen once more, this time deliberately selecting *Choose Character Profile*. To my astonishment, or perhaps indicative of my impending insanity, the screen responded, shifting its display.

```
C:\Ascension>Admin.lta

Access Character Profiles:
1. Select Profile          [SCP]

C:\Ascension>_
```

“Ugh, whoever designed this thing was an idiot,” I grumbled, still questioning the reality of what I was seeing. But given the monsters and other surreal experiences, my skepticism quickly waned, replaced by murmured concerns about my sanity. I attempted to select the “Select Character Profile” prompt, but nothing happened. After several futile attempts, my fingers jabbing fruitlessly through the translucent screen, I gave up. With my arms crossed, I glanced over at Ray, who was still busy with the fuel pumps, only to catch a sudden flash from the screen out of the corner of my eye.

```
C:\Ascension>Admin.lta
Accessing Character Profile...
Initializing...
```

```

Loading Modules
Complete.
Initializing Character Data..
Warning: Data Corruption Detected.
Error Code 403 - Corrupted File.
Error Code 504 - Titan Profile Expired.

```

```

Character Profile Management:
1. Reset Profile           [RCP]
2. Choose Profile         [CCP]
3. Add Profile            [ACP]
4. Delete Profile         [DCP]

C:\Ascension>_

```

“Hmm...” I mused, trying to decipher the screen’s message. Without clear context, I was essentially groping in the dark. However, I pieced together that if this interface selected Ray when I glanced his way, indicating he had an *expired profile*, I was onto something, even though I couldn’t access it. Uncertain of what else to do, I clicked on *Reset Profile*, silently hoping it was the right choice.

```

C:\Ascension>Admin.lta
Resetting Character Profile...
Please wait...

Data corruption overridden.
Please enter new profile name:

C:\Ascension>_

```

There was a lengthy pause as I mulled over what to give for the profile name. I should have consulted with Ray about whether this was his profile. Yet, I was still not entirely convinced I wasn’t hallucinating. Shifting uncomfortably in the backseat, my eyes fell on a silver-looking helmet, part of Ray’s eclectic cosplay armor he inexplicably brought along. The name *Obsidian* popped into my head. It was, after all, in his streaming name. Staring at his armor, a hybrid of knightly plate and Spartan gear, gave me another idea to finish off the profile name. With a resigned shrug, I whispered, *The Obsidian Spartan*. Surprisingly, the name auto-filled on the screen—I hadn’t seen a keyboard anywhere and was momentarily concerned about how I’d enter it.

```

C:\Ascension>Admin.lta
New Data Accepted.
Reinitializing Character Data...
Complete.

Profile: [The_Obsidian_Spartan]
Character Class Grade Options:

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1. Common
2. Uncommon
3. Rare
4. Epic
5. Legendary
6. Mythic
7. Exotic

Note:

- It is recommended that the character choose the class within the grade selected by the USER.
- Skills will then be assigned based on the character's combat style, class, levels, and soul.

C:\Ascension>_

I was at a loss. Naturally, I felt I should choose the highest option, but *Exotic* didn't seem superior to *Mythic*. *Exotic* suggested uniqueness rather than superiority, whereas *Mythic* just sounded, well, mythical. Faced with this tough decision, I seriously considered calling Ray over to share what I suspected might be a hallucination. Climbing out of the car, I noticed Mara turning to stare at me. I offered a smile before glancing at Ray, who appeared to be turning pale as he stared into the space in front of him.

"Huh, I guess I'm not going crazy," I muttered.