

Chapter 2

*The seven hold answers,
All seven assigned.
The second helps locate
Not once but two times.*
— Chau 2:9, Book of Moira

Chairman Loo was sitting in his office, poring over the latest monthly report on portal activity. The frequency of portal appearances had been rising, as well as the level of creatures that dwell within. Mandatory vanguard testing and early training was started because of the demand for skilled warriors. Chairman Loo leaned back in his chair and sighed. If the portals did not abate, they wouldn't be able to keep up.

No one else saw this as a problem. Monsters never left the portals, so other than the minor inconvenience of destroying objects occupying the space it phased into, more portals meant more opportunities for the guilds to make more money. But Chairman Loo wasn't as complacent. The monsters were getting stronger and the portals' engulf radius was getting larger. More civilians

would be affected by the portals, and that meant more casualties.

A couple of knocks sounded at his door.

“Enter,” said the chairman. His assistant came in, an intimidating woman in her thirties dressed in a form-fitting black suit. Her blonde hair was tied back in a tight bun, and she peered over her dark-rimmed glasses at the Chairman.

“Fyn’s sensors are down,” she said.

“And I suppose the fool of a guard is not at his post,” said Chairman Loo.

“We’ve been trying to get a hold of him, but he hasn’t answered his phone. We’ve dispatched a few operatives, just in case.”

“Keep me posted, Assistant Verlaigh,” said the Chairman. The assistant nodded and left the room.

Paige was inside Fyn’s portal.

She was breathing fast and was too afraid to move. Were there monsters in the area? She clutched the hair dryer in her hands. She should have brought a weapon.

The dungeon she entered was a hewn passage made of smooth stone and was wide enough to drive a large truck through. She couldn’t locate a source of light, yet she could see perfectly well. The scent of crypt lingered in the air, reminding her of Jess’s constant warnings of death and maiming.

Now what?

Paige gained courage from knowing the future, but she no longer had that advantage. There were no dreams of entering the portal and she wasn’t going to

risk sleeping in the dungeon.

She looked behind her. The portal was open and offered a safe passage back to Agatha's bathroom. It was tempting. She wondered how Jess was doing. Would she run into her and the guard if she tried to escape? Would she and Jess get thrown in jail? She didn't want to risk Jess's chances of becoming a vanguard, but then she didn't want to increase her chances of becoming a corpse.

Paige looked down the corridor leading into the dungeon. She wasn't going to die yet; she knew that from the beginning of the first chapter. Of course, the beginning of the first chapter painted a grim picture of blood and being grabbed by the leg.

Whoever wrote the Book wouldn't kill her, would they? Why go to all the trouble of letting her read her future just to finish her off? Furthermore, there were still six other doors. The story wouldn't end early, would it?

"Let's do this," said Paige, gripping her hair dryer. She stepped forward.

"Are you sure this is okay?" asked Jess. She and the security guard were in front of the door leading into the room holding Fyn's portal.

"Of course! No one comes here, and nothing has happened ever since the Agency set this up. I don't even get surprise inspections," said Jim.

He took a fondness to Kiki. His friends were bored of his vanguard stories, but this teenager hung on his every word. His pride got the better of him and he offered to show her Fyn's portal. But what was the passcode? He didn't go into the room that often.

After a few tries, Jim got the door opened. He let out an awkward laugh, mumbled something about every month changing the door's passcode, and held it open.

"This is it. This is actually Fyn's portal," whispered Jess as she walked into Agatha's ex-bathroom.

She had only seen a portal once before, when she was first tested, but she was too young to remember. Trainees were strictly prohibited from going near a portal and Jess knew she was taking a huge risk, but it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Jim was expounding on how his morning duties included cleaning the tiles of the portal room, but she had lost interest. Nothing could distract her from the portal. She walked around the iron structure and gasped.

"Did you find something interesting, back there?" laughed Jim as he walked over.

He stopped as he saw it. His brain froze and the only synapses that worked went into the effort of blinking.

He was instantly inside with Jess.

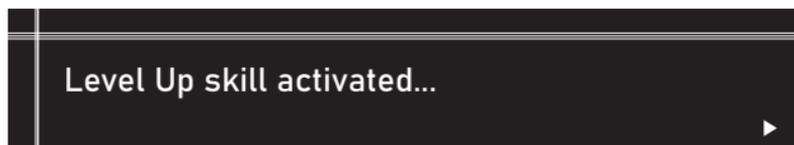


Paige yelped in surprise and jumped back. Hanging in her field of vision was a small prompt like one would expect in a video game. Paige turned her head

and the message moved with her. She closed her eyes tightly and then peeked. The prompt remained, hanging in the air.

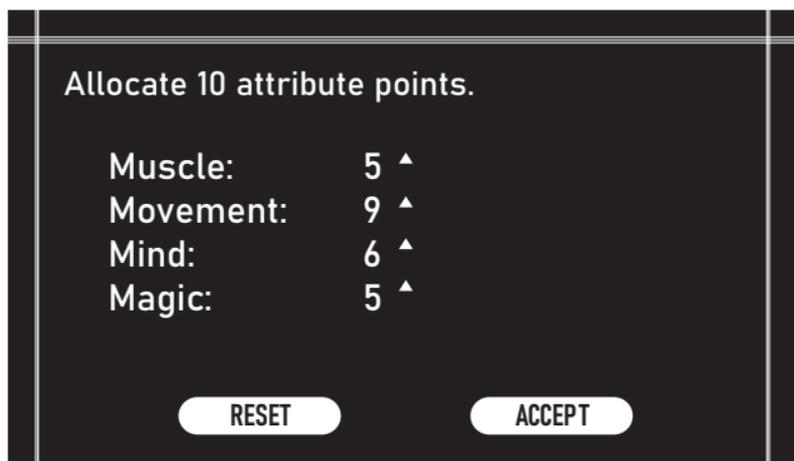
“What the— What is this?”

Her hand reached out and touched the window. The words changed as the prompt advanced:



Paige stood still. She had imagined a number of possible scenarios after entering the portal,* but this she didn't see coming. She was an avid reader of manga and knew this trope well. Her heart was pounding as she tried to contain her excitement.

She touched the prompt again:



“This is amazing,” said Paige. “Wait, my mind is only 6?”

* Only 75% of the scenarios ended in death. The ones where she survived had her mom sending her off to boarding school.

It was rather humbling having her attributes laid out bare in numerical format. There were a number of questions she had, but the absurdity of the situation was overshadowed by her compulsion to best allocate her points. She loved video games and she knew this could be very important. Or not. Each video game was different. She wondered if there was a FAQ she could check.

She was allowed to allocate ten attribute points. Was that a lot of points? Paige didn't know. It sounded like a lot, but she didn't know the grade scale. If she raised her **MUSCLE** to 6, what did that mean? Could she pick up sixty pounds instead of fifty? Were her current scores the average for an eighteen-year-old girl? And did she even have time for any of this? She was standing in the middle of a dungeon, holding a hair dryer of all things, and she was debating over where to best put her points.

Why didn't her future self tell her? Paige stopped. She recalled her dream.

"Your mind is strong."

That part of the dream was now making sense. Was she really telling herself to put points into her **MIND**? And would she remember to tell herself to do this in the future?

If she put her points into **MIND**, she would remember. She would also be able to solve the puzzles when they came. Would it be prudent to sink all her points into **MIND**? What if the system penalized any type of min-maxing? **MUSCLE** made sense against monsters and **MAGIC** seemed really cool.

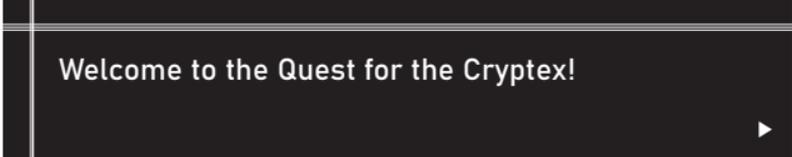
But that wouldn't help with puzzles.

Using her finger, she pressed the arrow beside the **MIND** attribute ten times. Paige chuckled to herself. Had this story been on the internet, the nasty com-

ments would have skyrocketed. Who raises the intelligence attribute if not for magic? She does. That's who.

"Accept," said Paige. The prompt changed.

"Interesting, it's also voice activated," she thought.



Welcome to the Quest for the Cryptex!

"What? What's the 'Quest for the Cryptex'? Do I need to write things down? Wait, I just increased my MIND, so I shouldn't have to, right?" asked Paige.

She reached up and touched the dialogue box. It disappeared, and her focus came back to the dungeon she was in. Was she smarter? She wasn't too sure, but a lot of questions came cascading into her head. They stacked in her brain, as if waiting to be checked off like a task list.

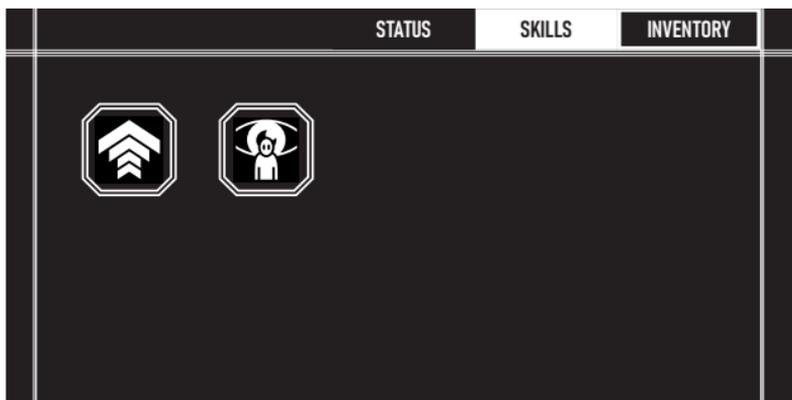
At the top was the question "What was the Quest for the Cryptex?" Paige always thought being smart meant more answers, but this was not the case.

"Status," said Paige. She said this instinctively and her attributes appeared before her in a dialogue box:

	STATUS	SKILLS	INVENTORY
PAIGE			
LEVEL 1	<input type="text"/>		
Muscle:	5		
Movement:	9		
Mind:	16		
Magic:	5		

“This is freaking brilliant. Hmm, the status screen doesn’t show much. Don’t I get a class? Will I eventually get a class? If they gave me an interface like a video game, why didn’t they provide tutorials? Oh well, that’s why my points are in MIND. Let’s take a look at my skills.”

The display switched to a blank page, save for two icons:



Paige clicked the first one that looked like an arrow pointing up:



Given what she had experienced, that made perfect sense. She was so excited she clapped to herself. Swiping the skill away, she chose the next one.



THE FOURTH EYE

Rarity: Mythic

See what others see through the fourth wall.

“Whoa. I have *Deadpool* powers too,” said Paige. How did she gain these rare skills? She hoped she was still human. She looked at her body. Nothing seemed different. At least she wasn’t turned into a slime.

She heard a distant howl. Right, there were still monsters in this dungeon. She could leave. The exit was right there, but then it’d be over. Facing monsters seemed the most illogical option, but her gut wanted to explore further.

There came another chilling howl. Were the monsters aware of her presence, and if so, could Paige do something about it? *Doctor Who* seemed to rely on wits alone. Hopefully, she could do the same.

Paige was betting on this dungeon being different from normal dungeons. If there was a sealed entrance with a lock and a clue to open that lock, then there may be more purpose to this dungeon other than clearing it of monsters. Could the dungeon be holding a treasure? Or perhaps imprisoning an ultimate evil?

She didn’t like the latter possibility, but she was led here for a reason and she would follow it through to the end. She ran off in the direction opposite the howls. She had some exploring to do.

Jim’s eyes were wide. A deep-seated fear he had

not experienced for over five years had grabbed hold.

“We can’t be here. We have to go,” he barely stut-tered out.

Jess was equally scared. If she was caught in a portal, an illegal portal at that, the Vanguard Agency would throw her out before she even got a chance to apply for guild membership.

“We have to leave,” said Jim and he grabbed Jess’s wrist. He felt an electric shock, another familiar feeling. He looked at Jess’s wrist. Tendrils of electricity arced out.

“Are you a vanguard? You have the same affinity as me,” asked Jim.

“No! I mean, yes. I finished my vanguard training, but I haven’t applied to a guild yet. But this... are you telling me I have affinity to electricity? Are you serious?” asked Jess. This was the best news she had learned all day.

Vanguards were further categorized by element affinity. Not every vanguard had one, but those that did were extremely powerful. Jess squealed and hugged Jim. Electrical arcs shot out on contact.

“Ow! Don’t do that. There’s a reason you only have one electric vanguard in a party: it becomes too dangerous to those around. Look, we have to leave,” said Jim and he turned Jess towards the portal.

“I command the power of electricity! I’m Pikachu!” yelled Jess. To discover her element before she even got her license was a boon she couldn’t have imagined.

“We don’t have time for this, Kiki. Go! I am not leaving you in here,” said the guard. Jess blinked and she was outside of Fyn’s portal. Soon after, Jim joined her.

Jess stepped away from the portal. Its engulf radius was larger than she expected and she didn’t want to

be pulled again. There was no risk of that, however, since Jim was shooing her out the door.

“Out! Out! Let’s go!” said Jim as he opened the door and waved Jess out. He quickly lead her to the front of the building. On the way out, he noticed the monitors were not working. How did he miss that?

Jess was lost in thought. If Fyn’s portal was open, then Paige actually did it. It would have been too coincidental for the portal to randomly open and engulf Paige. But if Paige was in the dungeon, then she was in there alone with no training, no weapons, and a hair dryer.

“We need to get some vanguards in there!” Jess cried to the Jim.

“I’m sure they’re on their way. The Agency would have noticed the security cameras going out and I see there are a few messages on my phone. You, on the other hand, can’t be here! If they found out I let a civilian into the portal, I’m as good as dead!”

Jess didn’t argue. The last place she wanted to be was here. She opened the front gate and ran out. She felt guilty for leaving Paige behind, but there was nothing she could do. She could only trust in that Book of hers.

“Be safe, Paige. Please, be safe,” thought Jess.

Assistant Verlaigh knocked on the Chairman’s door, waiting only a second before entering. Chairman Loo was still at his desk, not any further with the portal report.

“Code Fyn, sir,” said Verlaigh.

The Chairman immediately stood up, put on his jacket, and walked out of the room with Assistant

Verlaigh. Three other associates joined them, and they made their way to the elevator.

“There wasn’t an actual breach, was there?” asked the chairman.

“No, not that we’re aware of. But the portal opened when the security cameras were down. The guard on site reset a blown fuse so they’re functional again. Also, all perimeter cameras have been activated and transferred to our control. If a breach has occurred, our people are monitoring it,” reported the assistant.

“The guard didn’t notice the monitors were down?” asked the chairman.

“He was out for coffee at the time. He’s currently back at his post.”

The elevator door opened to the underground garage. A military transport truck was at the ready, and in front of it, a limo. An associate opened the door for the Chairman as he approached while Assistant Verlaigh entered the limo on the other side. She pulled out a tablet and handed it to the chairman.

“Here’s a live feed of the portal. As you can see, one side is intact, but the side with the mask symbol has opened,” said Assistant Verlaigh. The first thing the chairman noticed was the shape of the portal: it was square.

Their convoy pulled out of the garage and the drivers turned on their sirens. Soon, the whole world would know Fyn’s portal had opened. Had it been up to the chairman, he would have kept everything confidential, but no guild would allow that.

“The Blood Guild on route?” asked the chairman.

“Yes. We’ll have plenty of time to investigate the portal ourselves before they arrive. However, preliminary measurements have shown the gate is surprisingly low in magic saturation. Lower than any other

portal, in fact,” said Assistant Verlaigh.

“Really? We may not need the brutality of that guild” said the chairman with a hint of relief.

“Still, better safe than slaughtered,” said the assistant.

“How are you feeling, Verlaigh?” asked the Chairman.

“Wary, but a bit excited,” said the assistant.

“Who wouldn’t be? Still, if this turns out to be all show and no substance, I’ll be celebrating in my office. The Blood Guild, on the other hand, will be upset. You saw how much they paid for the bidding. Heh, I’m going to get an earful from Guildmaster Thull if this turns out to be a dud.”

“The public will also be disappointed,” said Verlaigh.

“I’m sure the networks will squeeze as much as they can out of it. Still, we shouldn’t be too optimistic. There’s no telling what could be in there,” said the chairman as he handed the tablet back to his assistant.

“We’ll be ready, sir,” said Assistant Verlaigh.



“I should have trained more,” thought Paige as she struggled to run down another corridor. She stopped to catch her breath. Maybe she should have allocated points into MOVEMENT. Still, her high MIND attribute gave her an excellent sense of direction. She mapped out the dungeon layout in her head as she ran through it.

Another benefit was heightened observation. She noticed a number of traps as she explored the dungeons and avoided springing them. They were of a curious design, but still made sense within the current

architecture of the dungeon. She worried the magical world employed methods to bend space and create traps that couldn't logically fit within the confines of Newtonian space.*

But her past self lacked so much forethought! This was a world she had so many questions about and yet she wasted her whole year learning how to run properly and fretting over footnotes.

Another howl echoed ahead of her. It was almost here. Paige didn't know what manner of creature was pursuing her, but considering it was able to catch up meant it traced her scent.

She tried to rest for a bit. With no weapons, she had to save as much strength as possible. However, her muscles were tense and her heart wasn't in a relaxing mood.

From up ahead, she heard the strange sound of strong tapping. They were probably the claws of the creature on the stone floor. Paige shuddered and strained her ears. She could hear it getting closer, but she didn't move. The tapping was eventually joined by laboured breathing. And then a stench hit her.

Monster encounters in comics and video games never emulated smells and now she was thankful for that. This was awful.

Her disgust was interrupted by fear. Paige saw a large shape run by at the cross section further down the corridor. She heard it howl and there came a flurry of tapping sounds, as if the creature was trying to reverse direction.

It found her.

Paige turned around and ran as fast as she could.

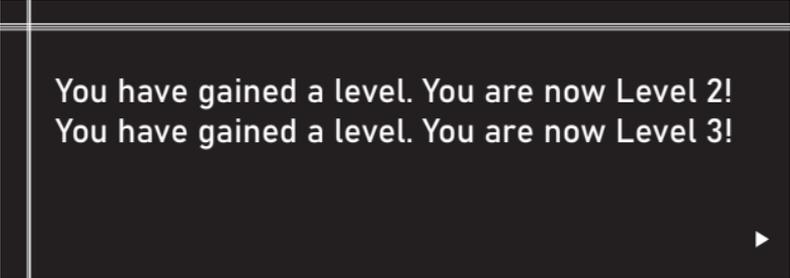
* She also noticed she used terms like Newtonian space. It was always unfamiliar when she read it in the Book, but now it rolled off her tongue effortlessly.

Behind her came a roar, mixed with a strange grunting. She knew no animal that sounded like that, but then she had never met a monster before. She risked a quick glance behind her, realized her mistake, and found the reserves to pick up the speed.

There was no breathing-down-the-neck scenario here; if she could feel its breath, it was too late. The clicking of its claws sounded the beat to her death march and her brain calculated three seconds until her brain could do no calculating at all.

The tapping sound of the claws stopped as the creature leapt into the air. Paige jumped to the side into an adjoining corridor. She looked back as the beast landed and skidded across the smooth stone floors. She guessed correctly, the monster didn't have great traction. There was an immediate roar of disappointment, a mechanical snap, and then the sickening crunch of a large body being impaled.

A chime rang in her head, and she immediately looked up from the crouched position she had adopted. Her body ached, and she couldn't seem to get enough air. Her training did nothing. Slowly, the blurriness of her eyes focused, and she saw a dialogue box floating in the air:



You have gained a level. You are now Level 2!
You have gained a level. You are now Level 3!

Paige immediately perked up. She jumped two levels! She let out a tiny squeal and touched the display.

You have gained a new skill: Running.
You have gained a new skill: Pacifist.

“More skills too? This is amazing! Although, where was that running skill earlier? I’ve been training for a year at the track club. Hang on, my lungs feel better,” thought Paige.

She took in a deep breath. She was sure it was harder to breathe before this. Paige would need to check the skills later. She continued to the next window which showed her ten extra attribute points to assigne.

“Ten? I get ten points? Nice! That’s five points per level. I’ll split them evenly between MIND and MOVEMENT. Hmm, maybe I should make them nice round numbers. Whatever, I don’t want to pull too much from my MIND,”said Paige. She looked at her stats before accepting:

Allocate 10 attribute points.

Muscle:	5
Movement:	14 ▼
Mind:	21 ▼
Magic:	5

RESET

ACCEPT

Satisfied, she accepted the changes and stood up straight. Her legs wobbled; she was still fatigued from being chased. That didn't make sense. If she leveled, why weren't her stamina levels reset? Why was she still exhausted? That was pretty unfair.

Her thoughts were interrupted by more howling. The rest of the monsters were close. She went back to examine the creature she had lured into the trap. It smelled horrible up close and she held her nose.

Paige first noticed the ears.

"A rabbit? Really?" asked Paige aloud. It was the size of a large bear, had claws the length of her foot, but it was still a rabbit. She felt a little ashamed it took her so much effort to get rid of it.

The rabbit-beast was entangled in a mess of broken wood, metal, and stone. Blood was pooling around her feet, making a mess of the surrounding area. Paige looked at the destroyed trap and shuddered. It would have decimated a human party, but in this case, the size and force of the rabbit-beast had brought an end to both trap and monster.

Another round of howls echoed through the corridors, followed by the sound of multiple tapping claws. She only had minutes.

Paige grabbed a metal rod left over from the decimated trap and grit her teeth. This was going to be disgusting. She jammed the rod underneath the dead rabbit and, using the remains of the trap as a lever, raised the rabbit's body just high enough for her to fit underneath. Without any time to lose, she crawled underneath it and held her nose. The rabbit-beast was bleeding from a plethora of wounds and its blood coated every inch of her body. Paige immediately regretted every choice that led up to this moment.

Paige held her breath as she heard the beasts approach. On spotting their dead rabbit companion, they let out a loud wail and thumped repeatedly on the stone floor. Paige wondered if the collective noun for a group of rabbit-beasts was still called a ‘fluffle’? She thought the strangest things when close to death.

The creatures were quick to end their mourning and sniffed the air. Paige tensed up again, but the beasts didn’t come near her. She smiled as her deductions were correct again: they couldn’t trace her scent now that she was drenched in the blood and entrails of the dead rabbit-beast. She would suffer for this later, but at least she was alive.

Paige risked a quick peek. The monsters were not unlike the one she was hiding under, save their eyes. They glowed red. Why was that a thing? Were they not menacing enough? Come to think of it, how did they even survive in the dungeon? She didn’t come across any source of food or water. Were all portals like this? If she survived, she was going to research everything she could on the portals.

The beasts continued their search. The blood on her face was getting crusty and the miasmatic odor of dead rabbit was suffocating. After ten minutes, Paige was gifted with the sound of retreating claws. She nearly cried in relief.

Once the coast was clear, she tried crawling out from underneath the body with little success. The blood made the floor slippery and it was hard to get a grip. Above her, within reach, hung a paw pierced by the trap. Wiping her hands as best she could, she grabbed the paw and pulled herself free. At the last moment, something ripped off, and she stumbled to the ground.

A dialogue box popped up:

Item acquired: Claw of the Rabbit-Beast

Bearer of this claw is lucky!

Store in inventory?

DISCARD

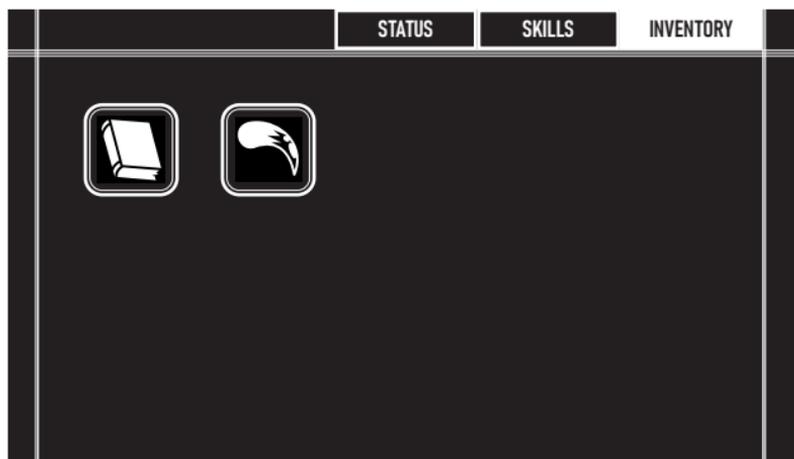
ACCEPT

“Brilliant!” exclaimed Paige, despite her situation. She was hoping for this. She didn’t get a chance to check her items earlier, but now that there were no nearby threats, she could indulge a bit. She looked down at the claw in her hand, only to be blocked by the dialogue box floating in front of her eyes.

“Are you kidding me? Didn’t the designer think I’d want to look at other things?” asked Paige. She selected *Accept* and both the window and the item she was holding disappeared. Paige groaned as she got up off the floor. She wiped her bloody hands on her equally bloody pants, saw the futility in that, and then wiped her hands against the wall. It left a gruesome display. Paige was in dire need of a shower and wanted nothing more than to leave the dungeon, but she couldn’t resist examining her new loot.

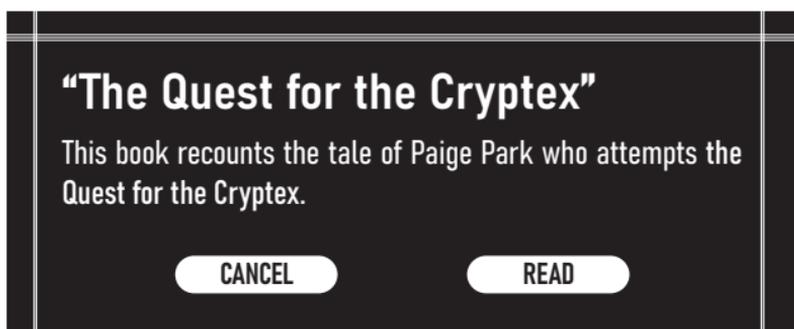
She looked around the body of the dead rabbit-beast. Were there other drops she could pick up? Maybe some gold? She didn’t want to risk leaving something behind, but she was already close to vomiting and digging in the beast’s corpse wouldn’t help matters.

Paige gave up on her greed and said “Inventory.” Her inventory window came up, but all thoughts of the claw disappeared.



She had two items.

Her fingers touched the one that looked like a book and its description came into view.



Without hesitation, Paige selected 'Read'. The Book opened up before her eyes, completely filling her field of vision. Her mental attributes now heightened, reading comprehension and speed were no longer obstacles.

There was a title page, but no author. She was hoping to find out who wrote the book, but no luck. So much for the rabbit claw. She continued to the first chapter. It was all there, and this time, she didn't have

to suffer through the hazy dream state. She skimmed through until the chapter's end, holding her breath as she turned its final page.

“Yes!”

Chapter Two was accessible.

There was another quote from the *Book of Moira*. She still didn't know what that book was. She did do her research in the past, but internet searches and book store inquiries came up empty. At first, she wondered if it was the Book itself, but the style was totally different. However, now wasn't the time to be hung up on yet another book no one knew the existence of. Paige continued.

“Hmm, the Book has events where I'm not present. That's useful. No surprise the Agency is on top of this,” thought Paige as she read about the chairman. She kept reading until she got to the passage regarding Jess. Her body, tense with apprehension, relaxed. Jess was safe, one less thing to worry about.

Paige skipped her parts until the section after this one. The Agency was parked outside of the entrance, blocking that exit, and soon a guild would be clearing this dungeon. She didn't know if she was going to escape, but she was going to find out.

Paige read to the end of the chapter.

Chairman Loo walked through the front entrance of the building which housed Fyn's Gate. Jim was in the security room, ready to greet him. His hand was held up to his cap in a salute, hoping his nervousness didn't manifest too much sweat on his uniform.

“Good evening, sir! Vanguard Jim Stone reporting. There has been no activity recorded since the last re-

port, sir.”

Chairman Loo looked at the monitors. All of them were active and recording the surrounding area. Civilians had been evacuated so the only people visible on the monitors were the Agency’s guards. Although the portal’s opening was not fully disclosed, people knew an evacuation of this neighborhood meant something was up with Fyn’s Portal. The internet would be going wild with speculation, but he trusted Assistant Verlaigh was on top of it.

“Have we discerned when the portal opened, Mr. Stone?” asked Chairman Loo.

Jim hesitated. The chairman’s address without an official title was not lost on him.

“No, sir,” said Jim.

Chairman Loo signaled to Assistant Verlaigh and they walked towards the back room housing the portal.

“Current readings?” he asked.

“Still normal. All measurements indicate extremely low levels of magic saturation,” said Verlaigh as she typed in the passcode for the final door. Inside were three Agency guards.

“Engulf radius is five feet, chairman,” said the assistant.

Chairman Loo walked behind the portal to see the opening. He made sure to stay outside the engulf radius.

“So other than the door and its square appearance, it’s completely normal. So far, so good. The only abnormality was the fuse. Does anyone know why it surged?” asked the chairman.

“No. We’ve searched the logs from the local electric company, and it gave no indication of any spikes. Someone could have tampered with the fuse box but

it's locked with a key that Jim Stone keeps on himself, and he was out. Regardless, the fusebox doesn't show any signs of being opened. Or dusted. There is a small possibility that the opening of this portal may be different from the others, causing some type of interference that shorted out the cameras."

"But only the cameras and no other electrical equipment?" asked the chairman.

"It was a small possibility," said Verlaigh.

"Check the footage from the surrounding businesses' security cameras. Log every person who came within walking distance of this facility," ordered the chairman as he walked towards the exit.

"You suspect foul play, Chairman?" asked Assistant Verlaigh.

"I suspect everything. Well, probably not the guard. Still, check his story," said the Chairman. "Also, inform the Blood Guild they won't be needing experienced vanguards for this portal. They'll complain about the high price they paid, but they always complain."

"Yes, sir."

"The media caught up yet?"

"Reporters are swarming the headquarters as we speak," said Assistant Verlaigh.

"Of course they are," said Chairman Loo.

All the points thrown into MIND was paying off. It was phenomenal what she could picture and recall. Paige could now hold a 3D representation of the dungeon in her head and knew her position at all times. She couldn't wait to take her next exam.

She had the majority of the dungeon mapped out,

save for an area in the northwest where she suspected the rabbit-beasts had retreated to. They made no signs of reappearing after the death of one of their own. She wanted to gain more experience points, but the thought of facing the monsters was terrifying. Besides, what she needed to do was get out of this miserable place and take a bath.

Fortunately, the Book claimed there was an exit on the opposite side of the dungeon from the entrance. The layout was perfectly symmetrical, so Paige was able to locate it easily and it didn't take long to get to the final room.

She peered in, fearing a boss monster, even though she knew the room had no enemies. The Book remained true, and there was nothing else in the room except for the door, the same size and shape as the entrance door.

Paige walked up to it, noting the different pattern carved on its front. Her fingers went up to trace the drawing. The door also differed in its composition, made of copper instead of iron. She wondered if that would come into play at a later time.

Paige checked the back of the door. This time, instead of a symbol, there were three numbers:

24 25 38

The first time she was presented with a puzzle, it had taken her many months to figure it out.

And now? Now she could locate the answer with ease. She uttered a word, and the back of the door disappeared to reveal her world.

Finally, she could go home.

