

When I appeared again, I was on an unfamiliar planet, standing in a vast blue meadow. The grass came up to roughly my knees, and I could sense numerous monsters within the area. Some of them were as large as cows, others as small as little snakes, and... there was one I saw in the distance that was several dozen meters tall, hunched over with rocks growing out of its back. Given how none of the other monsters were fleeing from it, it appeared to be a herbivore.

I took a few more moments simply to study the soul residing in the bracer I wore. This was a highly complex item, and as such it took me some time to figure out the method of activating it. Once I did, I aimed my hand forward, infusing it with my spiritual energy and muttering. "This is the end."

The black gem on the bracer pulsed, a powerful wave of energy radiating out from me in the direction I was aiming. The monsters along that path froze, before their bodies simply collapsed off to the side. Even the giant in the distance fell, powerless to resist The One Who Speaks the End.

Yet that was not the extent of this item's power. Now that I had experienced it myself, I had a deeper understanding of how it worked. *Aurivy. This is an uninhabited world, right?*

By anything intelligent, at least. Once Aurivy confirmed that, I took a deep breath, crouching down and placing my hand on the ground. "Life ends." The blue grass around my hand began to wither and blacken, spreading out in a ring that grew faster the larger it became. Within a few seconds, it had passed the horizon, killing every plant and monster in its wake.

Once I felt how far the range of this power was stretching, I knew that it was the right move to take this power, and even more so to get rid of the 'End Boss'. If he were to seriously unleash his power... his legends of 'World Smasher' and 'Suneater' weren't only for show.

Next, I lifted my hand up into the air, focusing more of my spirit into the bracer. "The sky ends."

Clouds were shredded and scattered, the blue sky melting into darkness above me. One layer of the atmosphere after the next was being stripped away, until there was nothing left. I could feel the air becoming thinner by the moment, before clenching my fist. "The world ends."

Now, it was the ground beneath my feet that began to shatter and turn to dust, spreading out rapidly in all directions. When this effect reached the horizon, it created an all new horizon for me to witness, one stretching out wider and wider until there was nothing left of the planet I had been standing on. Nothing but dust...

At this point, I had confirmed my suspicions about this power. If I designated something as a target for 'ending', the power within the bracer would target it. This was certainly not an 'absolute' rule. Instead, it was a contest. The spiritual power within the bracer was specialized in

targeting weak points and breaking things apart. If a target was solid enough to resist that, then they would emerge unscathed.

This is a power that probably won't work on those that have taken all three steps of perfection. I shook my head as I realized that. Gods would still be susceptible, because godhood was not necessarily a level above perfection. However, those who had walked the path of perfection would have a much greater resistance to this power.

Thankfully, this would still be enough to work on the vast majority of anyone that would be coming from UpperLevel's world. From what information I purchased from Balu, there wasn't any major public knowledge related to perfection. UpperLevel pursued a very linear path from birth to godhood, and those who strayed from the path, such as receiving power from the void, lost the system's support.

It was hard to say if refusing the power of the void was a weakness that he would overcome, or an intentional path he had chosen to focus his growth. Either way, I was certain that this would still be a difficult battle for me to face.

I dismissed the bracer on my arm, storing it within my soul. This was the second piece of my spiritual armor, with this one focusing purely on offensive power. *Aurivy... take me back home.* I whispered in my mind, looking at the dispersing cloud of dust that had been created from my experiment.

Hanya was nervous, her throat dry despite her energy state. It was patch day, and the new update would release in just a few minutes. There was even a countdown to the specific moment on the Darkflame Technologies website, making sure that everyone was prepared for the transition.

When it hit, there was... not much in the way of fanfare. The system flickered off for a moment, only to come back thirty seconds later with the new update. For those within Virtual, there was even less to see, as the change happened in a mere moment.

Less than a minute after the change, there was a knock on their door. Geoff all but ran to the door, opening it to find the Keeper standing outside with a smile. "Are you two ready?" He asked, and the two of them were... honestly not sure of the answer to that.

However, even so, they nodded their heads in agreement. "Okay. I've got to take your files temporarily off of the cloud. I don't know how this will feel for the two of you, but just try to stay calm."

The two nodded their heads, and the Keeper tapped on his synchronizing watch. Hanya reached out to grab Geoff's hand, the two closing their eyes and waiting with stiffened bodies, expecting the world to explode around them.

"And we're done." The Keeper's voice spoke up again. There was no eruption of energy, no shattering of the world around them. Rather, it was a clean transition from closing their eyes to opening them again. They now stood within a rather large office overlooking a city of Desbar. Given how Ashley sat behind the desk with a small smile, this was clearly her own office.

"That's... it?" Geoff asked in confusion, looking around. Sure enough, the two of them could once again feel their connections with the void being established. The powers that they had lost by being in the virtual world were being restored one by one.

"That's right." Ashley nodded her head, sliding a hard drive across her desk. "This is the storage medium that holds your digital consciousness. For the sake of mental continuity, I would suggest wiping this. If you are uploaded in this state to Virtual again, your selves on that side are likely to go into a panic. For that reason, it is better to create new Virtual selves based on your current personas."

The Keeper smiled as he listened to that, seeming quite happy that the duo had managed to return to the real world. Hanya looked over at Geoff, seeming conflicted about wiping their other selves. However, Geoff shook his head. "It's something we need to do." He told her softly. Keeping it as a life insurance policy wasn't really a good idea, given that they had experienced first hand how 'time' was felt in such a state.

"Our selves within the drive are frozen. Even if a thousand years pass, they'll think it was just the blink of an eye. If they're brought out in the future, they'll have no understanding of what had happened, and think that there was a problem with the transfer."

Hanya nodded her head reluctantly, signaling for Ashley that it was okay to wipe the drive. With a look of understanding, she brought her hand out, and lightly tapped a finger on the drive. "It's done. From now on, the two of you can go back to your normal lives. Help people as you wish, *live* as you wish. The world has already asked you to sacrifice yourself, and you answered splendidly. Now, it is up to you to choose where to take your path."

Hanya smiled at that, glancing over at Geoff once again. She knew that he would always want to help people, and would be there with him every step of the way. "Thank you both for this." She said, offering a deep bow towards both Ashley and the Keeper.

After the two left the office, Ashley looked over at the Keeper, who held another hard drive behind his back. "It didn't work?" She asked with a knowing smile. She obviously was not referring to the recreation of the two that had just left, but rather...

The Keeper shook his head with a bitter smile. "I knew the system wouldn't let me off that easy, but I had to try." After saying that, he passed the hard drive containing his own Virtual self back to her, glancing at the message that had appeared when he attempted to remake his own Virtual self.

Unique Entity: Keeper detected. Unable to reproduce Unique Entity.
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"Still, that's good to know." Ashley said, taking the drive and leaning back in her seat. "It means that people won't be able to clone you if they manage to copy your energy, or get ahold of this."

"I suppose." The Keeper nodded, mentally deleting the files that the system had saved to his profile. In order to use the new system, one must have access to the file that they wished to materialize. Afterwards, that file was saved to a system profile, and could then be materialized at will, so long as the proper energy was available.

That meant that he had been given the full files of both Hanya and Geoff at the moment of their transfer to the real world. "Have you set up a system for people to be able to purchase the files for ingame items?" He asked, glancing over at Ashley.

She let out a deep sigh, nodding her head. "That's right. Once the economy has fully shifted to the new currency, I'm going to launch that program. How about you? How did your preparation go?"

The Keeper gave a wry smile at that. "It's stronger than I thought. Hopefully, I won't have to use it around others for a long time." After saying that, the Keeper left the office, leaving Ashley alone within it.

"This will be our first serious invasion from a game Keeper, huh?" She asked herself, crossing her hands to prop up her chin. "I'll need to make sure that everything is ready before they arrive."

As someone that held the domain of Games through her subordinate, Blank, Ashley was the one who truly had to prepare the most against an invasion from a Gamer world. First of all, she had to make sure that the game system itself was not susceptible to attack from the invaders. Secondly, she needed to try to find some way to install a system within their world that might detect those who are using a different game system than the one installed in their world. If she was able to do that, then maybe they could track the invaders before they made their move. Assuming, of course, that they didn't have countermeasures.

That was what information warfare was all about, though. Seeing who was able to develop the most countermeasures against the other party first would determine who ultimately won the battle. If their opponent was able to hack their system, they lose. If they were able to stay

hidden long enough to drastically weaken the Keeper's power, they lose. There were so many paths to defeat, and it was up to Ashley to cover any of them that could be involved with the world's game system.

Thankfully, she had already assigned the task to her design team, though they were uncertain if they would be able to get the tracking program developed and installed in time for the invasion. The fact that they would be completely cut off during the invasion itself meant that they would need to install the system directly to the Keeper's profile before that time came. Otherwise... well, she hoped that the others were making suitable preparations, as well.