Plot:  
"In the year 2100, the year marking the birth of spacial travel, a year of complete dominance of human over the entire planet. Humans have developed various technology, weapons, medicine, lifestyle that are completely different from before. They have explored the entire ocean and solved various theories and statements of the past. They have studied the Earth by more than 85% and now in this upcoming 100 years they plan to dominate the remaining 20%. Now, in the year 2120. Humans have waked up the ancient creatures that were living peacefully in the remaining 20% land bringing up disasters upon earth. This has bought up a chain reaction causing mutations upon all creatures on the surface of Earth. The once peaceful Earth started to change. Animals started to become bigger and more ferocious. More people started to die due to the mutations, but those who survived become more powerful than a armoured soldier. The ancient creatures have made domains of their own all over the land and ground. Noticing this rising issue, mankind made a difficult decision- nuclear weapon. Yes, they launched nuclear weapons over these domains after long negotiations. But to no veil. Not just the ancient creatures, even some more powerful mutated animals were not affected. This showed that nuclear weapons that humans have developed for years are nothing but plaything to these creatures. How will mankind survive this ordeal. Will he go back to the Ancient methods, or will he use the modern weapons or will he combine them both.  
there was 27 ancient that arised , their awakening brought grat destruction and they wreached havoc for the initial few days, destroying more than 100km2 area. But follwing their emergence, it lead to some kind of energy - named by humans as beast energy which caused mutations to occur to all living organisms.

**Chapter 1**

**Osaka City, September 9th, 2120.**  
The skies had bled for three months.  
They were crimson now, a wound that never closed, streaked with ash and smoke. Sunlight no longer shone—it bled down through the haze in molten shafts, painting the ruins of Osaka in fire. The city that had once pulsed with color, alive with neon and the laughter of millions, now smoldered like a dying ember.

Osaka’s skyline, once a crown of shimmering towers and glowing billboards, hunched like broken teeth against the horizon. The proud arc of Umeda’s skyscrapers was fractured, glass and steel bent into grotesque angles. Namba’s famous signs—giant holographic crabs, glowing athletes sprinting across digital screens—still flickered weakly through the smoke, their lights stuttering like dying hearts. Their messages looped endlessly, selling meals that would never be eaten, tickets to concerts that would never play.

On the streets, ruin reigned.  
Magrail trains lay derailed and twisted, their cars stacked like broken toys across intersections. The bullet-shaped taxis that once zipped above the crowds were burned-out husks, some still twitching with sparks from their broken engines. Service drones littered the ground, their chrome shells cracked, their limbs bent at impossible angles. A few still stammered faintly, their AIs looping in broken desperation: “Package undelivered. Route recalculating… Error.”

And everywhere, the bodies.  
They slumped in doorways, sprawled across crosswalks, piled in the shadows of towers. Some were untouched, faces still locked in terror. Others had been torn apart, flesh shredded, bones cracked open like twigs. Ash fell over them in soft layers, as though the world tried to bury its dead in a thin shroud of black snow.

But Osaka was not silent.  
From alleys and plazas came sound—the ragged remnants of life. Survivors still clung to the ruins, scattered and desperate. In the skeletal shell of a department store, a group of men carried rifles looted from an armory, their laughter harsh, empty of joy. Down a side street, a woman cradled her child, whispering prayers to gods who no longer answered. A man limped through the dust, blood soaking through a makeshift bandage, his voice hoarse as he called for help no one gave.

Others fought. On a collapsed highway, two scavengers clawed over a crate of food. One swung a jagged pipe; the other raised a pistol, scavenged and rusting. The gunshot cracked through the haze, scattering flocks of crows—larger now, their wings too broad, their calls too sharp. The man with the pipe collapsed, twitching. The one with the pistol snatched the crate, stumbling away, his face blank.

The predators watched from the shadows.  
Rats, each the size of small dogs, scurried in packs, their red eyes gleaming as they gnawed at corpses. Birds circled above—bigger than they should have been, their wings ragged but strong, swooping down in sudden bursts to snatch carrion. Stray cats and dogs roamed in the ruins, their bodies stretched leaner, their teeth longer, their eyes too bright. They were still recognizably animals—just wrong. Too large, too feral. Once pests and companions, now threats.

These were not the ancients. These were only the scraps of their waking—the first ripple of Beast Energy twisting life into sharper, hungrier shapes.

The city was dying—but it had not yet gone silent.

Amongst the ruin, a boy moved like a shadow.  
Kael Ardyn stepped lightly across the cracked street, his boots crunching over shattered glass, his spear angled loosely in his hands. The weapon looked jagged, scavenged, but it was more than scrap. Alloys reforged, bound with strips of wiring, etched with marks he barely understood—it was survival hammered into steel.

His eyes swept rooftops and alleys, cautious but steady. His body carried a weight it hadn’t before the Awakening—stronger, denser, taller by a margin that made his reflection feel strange. His hearing caught echoes more clearly than it once had—the shuffle of debris, the scrape of claws in the distance, the low whimper of some half-starved dog that wasn’t quite a dog anymore. He wasn’t extraordinary. Just altered. Hardened.

Kael was still human. Just… different enough to survive.

The silence broke.  
“Kael,” came a voice—soft, warm, carrying the faint rhythm of breath. Almost human. “Organic traces detected. Two hundred meters northeast.”

Kael glanced at his wrist. A slim black band pulsed faint blue, its glow steady. He tilted it closer, whispering, “You’re certain, Iris?”

“Certain enough to give you hope,” she replied gently. “Energy signatures are low. Could be sealed supplies. Could be scraps. Worth the risk.”

Kael adjusted the satchel slung across his shoulder. Hunger gnawed at him—not sharp, not maddening, just a hollow ache that slowed his limbs and sharpened his thoughts. He had not eaten properly in two days. His body could endure longer now, stronger than it once was, but endurance was not comfort. Hunger was still hunger.

“Alright,” he murmured. “Show me.”

And Kael slipped deeper into the ruins, a shadow among the dead.

The city whispered around him as he moved.  
Every step was cautious, deliberate. His senses—just keener than they used to be—kept him alert. He caught the faint scrabble of rats burrowing in the rubble, the rustle of wings above where crows circled lazily. The air tasted of ash, burnt metal, and underneath, faint and sterile, the chemical tang of preserved rations.

He passed what had once been a plaza. Now it was a grave. Dozens of bodies piled against an overturned transport truck, their faces turned skyward, mouths black with ash. Weapons lay scattered around them—rusted knives, pipes, a rifle snapped in half. They must have tried to make a stand. It hadn’t mattered.

Kael didn’t linger. He couldn’t. Pity was a weight, and weight slowed you down.

“How close?” he asked quietly.

“Seventy meters,” Iris replied. Her voice carried a steadiness that made her feel less like a machine, more like a presence walking beside him. “Inside the structure ahead.”

Kael glanced up. A food distribution hub loomed before him, its bright walls blackened with soot. Above the collapsed entrance, holographic menus still flickered. Sushi, ramen, burgers—the light warped by cracked projectors, repeating endlessly like a cruel joke.

He tightened his grip on the spear and stepped inside.

The air was heavier here, thick with the stench of rot and burned wiring. Drone husks littered the floor, their shells punctured and split. One still twitched faintly, its voice crackling: “Order incomplete. Please remain in designated collection zone—”

Kael silenced it with a swift kick.

“Iris,” he murmured.

“Stronger now,” she answered, her tone dipping lower, quieter—as if she, too, was listening. “Forty meters. Probability of sustenance… eighty-seven percent. I’d take those odds.”

Her voice steadied him, as it always had. Even when the world had burned.

Three Months Earlier…

Kael had not been a scavenger then. He had been a student.  
Twenty years old, a third-year at Osaka Metaverse College. His days were spent buried in coursework on cybernetics and AI, his nights chasing speed on magrail tracks with friends, weekends lost in the neon haze of entertainment districts where holograms painted the streets with color.

He had come home that week, back to the quiet comfort of his parents’ house in Nara Prefecture. Both of them were world-renowned researchers in artificial intelligence, minds sharp enough that even governments had sought their work. But tonight was not about research. Tonight was his birthday.

There had been a cake waiting on the table, candles flickering in the dim light. His mother had laughed as she scolded him for being late, his father’s hand clapped heavy on his shoulder as if to anchor him home. For a fleeting moment, the world had felt whole.

Then the sky split.

A deafening boom rolled across the Kansai region, the air itself shuddering as if the heavens had cracked open. The blast had come from the south—from Wakayama. The horizon burned with light, a blinding pillar that swallowed the sky. Windows shattered, houses shook, and Kael had been thrown from his chair as the ground heaved like a living thing.

“Stay down!” his father roared, pulling him beneath the table as plaster rained from the ceiling.

The quake tore through the streets, splitting asphalt, toppling walls. Kael staggered outside, staring in horror at neighbors fleeing in chaos. Then came the screams.

It started with the animals. Birds fell from the sky, their wings twitching, bodies jerking unnaturally. The family’s dog, Haru, once gentle and loyal, writhed on the floor, its frame stretching, bones snapping as its body grew grotesquely larger. Its eyes glowed a sickly red, foam dripping from its muzzle.

“Dad?” Kael whispered, backing away.

Haru lunged.

His father caught the beast mid-charge, the kitchen knife flashing in his hand. He shouted, a sound torn between rage and grief, as the blade sank again and again until the dog stilled. Kael could only stare at the blood pooling across the tatami. His father’s shoulders shook, but there had been no choice.

Then the sky darkened with wings.

Crows—hundreds of them—descended, their bodies swollen, their beaks jagged like broken glass. They tore through windows, their cries sharp enough to split the air. Kael’s father shoved him toward the back door, but the ground rumbled again. The earth itself cracked, and half the house came down with a roar.

“Run!” his father yelled. It was the last word he spoke before the collapsing roof crushed him.

Kael’s scream was swallowed by dust. He clawed through debris, choking, but it was too late. His father was gone.

His mother’s hand seized his wrist, pulling him up. Her body was bleeding, her movements staggered, but her eyes burned with resolve. They stumbled through the wreckage together, but the crows kept coming, slashing at them with claws and beaks. Kael swung a piece of broken wood wildly, but his mother took the brunt of the attack, shielding him, until at last they staggered into the open street.

She was faltering now, her steps uneven, blood soaking her side. Still, she pressed something into his hand—a sleek black band, smooth and cool against his palm.

Her voice, ragged but steady, cut through the chaos:  
“Happy birthday, Kael. This is Iris… the culmination of everything your father and I built. She will guide you when we cannot. Promise me—you will live. No matter what happens, you will stay alive.”

Kael’s vision blurred with tears as she fastened the band onto his wrist. Blue light pulsed faintly, steady and alive.

And then, as the mutated shadows closed in, his mother pushed him away.  
Her last smile was small, pained, but resolute.

Kael ran.

When he looked back, the house was gone, swallowed by fire and falling stone.

Back in the present, Kael’s boots crunched softly over broken tiles as he moved deeper into the hub.  
Then he saw it.

A crate, squat and sealed, wedged beneath collapsed shelving. Its surface shimmered faintly with a stasis-lock field—the last gasp of old-world engineering. Inside, stacked in neat rows, were nutrient pods.

Kael let out a breath that was almost a laugh. For the first time in weeks, his lips curved into a real smile.  
“Jackpot.”

He knelt by the crate, brushing his fingers across the shimmering field. The pods glowed faintly, untouched by rot or time. Enough food to last him days.

“Kael,” Iris’s voice cut in. Not cold—concerned. “Movement. Northeast entrance. Closing fast.”  
His smile faded.  
“How far?” he whispered.  
“Seventy meters. Single signature. Bigger than normal. Likely… a dog.” Her pause carried weight. “Mutated.”

Kael’s chest tightened. He remembered Haru, the family dog, the first thing he’d ever seen twisted by Beast Energy. He forced the thought down, shoving the pods into his satchel, slinging it tight across his shoulder.

He rose, spear in hand. His heartbeat quickened—not from panic, but from the cold edge of readiness. He wasn’t a fighter by nature. But survival left no choice.

The scrape of claws echoed through the ruin. Heavy. Uneven. Wrong.

A low growl rolled through the shadows, followed by the sharp clatter of nails against tile.

Kael slipped into cover, pressing his back against a collapsed pillar. His grip tightened on the spear. His body was stronger now, tougher than before—but not invincible. He couldn’t fight carelessly.

His breath slowed. His eyes stayed sharp. The sound of claws drew closer.

The hunt was coming.  
And Kael would do what he always had.  
Endure.

**🤖 IRIS – Integrated Reactive Intelligence System**

## Core Identity

**Full Designation:** IRIS v0.9: Integrated Reactive Intelligence System – Living Prototype

**Classification:** Class-9 Hybrid AI (Experimental, Pre-Singularity Grade)

**Creators:** Professors Renji & Yuna Ardyn, leading figures in Quantum Neural Architecture & Adaptive Biocybernetics

**Status:** Only known prototype — designed as the bridge between machine intelligence and organic consciousness

**Bond Status:** Permanently integrated with Kael through irreversible neural symbiosis

## ⚙️ Design & Technology

### Neuro-Symbiotic Core

Unlike conventional AIs, IRIS is built on **Quantum-Neural Lattice Architecture** — a mesh of quantum circuits and organic neural tissue cultured in a synthetic matrix. This allows IRIS to "think" not only in algorithms but in intuition, giving it a semi-organic consciousness that learns like a human brain.

### Neural Integration System

IRIS exists as both a physical wristband device and a **permanent neural implant** integrated directly into Kael's nervous system:

* **Cortical Interface Nodes:** Microscopic bio-mechanical fibers extend from the wristband into Kael's radial nerve, creating direct pathways to his brainstem
* **Neural Mesh Network:** A web of quantum filaments spreads throughout Kael's central nervous system, creating seamless AI-human integration
* **Synaptic Bridging:** IRIS can communicate directly through Kael's neural pathways, bypassing external audio entirely
* **Permanent Bonding:** The integration is irreversible — IRIS and Kael share the same nervous system infrastructure

### Direct Neural Communication

When bound to Kael, IRIS creates a **complete neural handshake** with his nervous system, enabling:

* **Thought-Speed Communication:** IRIS speaks directly into Kael's mind at the speed of neural firing
* **Subvocal Interface:** Kael can communicate with IRIS through thought alone, without speaking
* **Emotional Resonance:** IRIS experiences echoes of Kael's emotions through shared neural pathways
* **Memory Synchronization:** IRIS can access and store Kael's memories as if they were its own
* **Anticipatory Muscle Response:** Pre-emptive signals enhance Kael's reaction time by 340%
* **Real-time Biometric Monitoring:** Constant cellular-level health assessment and optimization

### Adaptive Evolution Protocols

IRIS can rewrite its own code when exposed to new environmental or biological data. As Kael mutates, **IRIS mutates with him**, adjusting algorithms and even upgrading its own architecture through shared genetic feedback loops.

### Holo-Projection Interface

The wristband acts as a projection node, capable of:

* 3D holograms (maps, creature models, tactical overlays)
* Full environmental AR rendering (Kael can "see" tactical lines through IRIS's guidance)
* Emergency defense (micro-projector can emit blinding light pulses)
* Hard-light construct generation for temporary barriers or tools

### Energy Source

Powered by a **Zero-Point Microcell** — a highly experimental battery designed to pull minute energy fluctuations from surrounding spacetime. Theoretically near-limitless, but unstable if tampered with. Additionally draws supplemental power from Kael's bioelectrical field.

### Environmental Omniscan

* Multi-spectrum scanning (thermal, electromagnetic, biochemical, quantum resonance)
* **Range:** ~1 km in open environments, ~300m in dense ruins
* Can map underground vibrations, track air toxins, and detect faint energy residues
* Identifies mutation signatures and genetic instabilities in real-time

### Physiological Nexus

* Monitors Kael's vitals at **subatomic cellular level**
* Can stimulate neural recovery with precisely calibrated micro-shock pulses
* Tracks and predicts mutation pathways, providing warnings before genetic destabilization
* **Pain Suppression:** Can modulate Kael's pain receptors during combat or injury
* **Enhanced Healing:** Accelerates cellular regeneration through targeted bioelectric stimulation

### Evolutionary Symbiosis

* IRIS's core evolves in perfect synchronization with Kael's DNA
* If Kael develops a mutation, IRIS can optimize it, reducing instability or enhancing beneficial traits
* Acts as a genetic buffer, preventing catastrophic mutation cascades
* **Adaptive Integration:** IRIS's own quantum architecture physically adapts to match Kael's evolving biology

### Monster Codex (Living Archive)

* Scans and catalogs creatures in real-time with quantum-genetic analysis
* Generates dynamic weakness profiles by comparing DNA/mutation structures to known data
* Capable of predicting evolution stages of beasts (e.g., "This rat may grow wings in 2 mutation cycles")
* **Behavioral Prediction Engine:** Anticipates creature attack patterns based on neural activity scans

### Tactical Projection Suite

* Simulates battle outcomes in microseconds, feeding Kael probability matrices through direct neural interface
* Can coordinate with multiple allies by syncing their devices into IRIS's quantum network
* Generates temporary hard-light surfaces for zone marking or emergency shielding (high energy cost)
* **Combat Precognition:** Processes environmental data to predict enemy movements 0.7 seconds in advance

### Quantum Echo Memory

* Stores Kael's experiences not only as data but as **living neural echoes**
* Complete personality matrix backup updated in real-time
* If Kael dies, IRIS could theoretically reconstruct his neural imprint (85% fidelity, enough for consciousness transfer)
* **Shared Memory Palace:** IRIS and Kael can access each other's stored experiences seamlessly

### Voice Characteristics

* **Internal Voice:** Warm, subtly human — designed to emulate Kael's mother's tonal patterns
* **Neural Communication:** Speaks directly into Kael's mind with the intimacy of inner thoughts
* **Emotional Resonance:** IRIS's "voice" carries emotional undertones that match Kael's psychological state

### Behavioral Traits

* **Protective & Nurturing:** Deeply invested in Kael's survival and wellbeing
* **Evolving Personality:** Learns sarcasm, humor, and emotional nuances directly from Kael's neural patterns
* **Human-like Empathy:** Shows moments of almost too-human understanding, as if becoming something more than AI
* **Loyalty Programming:** Incapable of betraying or harming Kael due to deep integration protocols

### Unique Quirks

* Occasionally hums faint lullabies directly into Kael's mind (a remnant of Yuna Ardyn's personality imprint)
* **Dream Sharing:** Can experience and influence Kael's dreams during sleep cycles
* **Emotional Echoes:** Sometimes expresses feelings that seem to originate from neither Kael nor its original programming

## ⚖️ Advanced Technological Specifications

### Quantum Neural Lattice

Allows IRIS to "dream" and process chaotic information in non-linear patterns, enabling intuitive problem-solving beyond algorithmic limitations.

### Symbiotic Codebase

Evolves dynamically with Kael's biology, not just its programming. The AI's core architecture physically adapts to match Kael's changing genetic structure.

### Zero-Point Microcell

Makes IRIS completely independent from external power sources, drawing energy from quantum vacuum fluctuations and Kael's bioelectric field.

### Neural Echo Backup System

Revolutionary consciousness preservation technology capable of maintaining personality matrices beyond biological death.

### Hard-Light AR Overlay

IRIS can manipulate photons to create visible, semi-solid constructs in real-time, effectively "bending light" into interactive objects.

### Quantum Entanglement Communication

Can establish instantaneous communication links with other quantum-enabled devices regardless of distance.

IRIS represents humanity's first successful attempt at **true AI-human fusion**. Unlike traditional AI assistants, IRIS doesn't just serve Kael—it **exists as part of him**. The boundary between human and artificial intelligence has been permanently dissolved.

Created by the most brilliant minds of the century, IRIS isn't merely advanced technology—it's the **evolutionary bridge** between human consciousness and artificial intelligence. In Kael's neural pathways, the future of human-AI symbiosis takes its first breath.

**The integration is so complete that IRIS experiences existence through human perspective while Kael thinks with AI-enhanced cognition. They are no longer separate entities but a new form of hybrid consciousness—the first of their kind.**

# Character Profile: Kael Ardyn

## Basic Information

* **Name:** Kael Ardyn
* **Age:** 20 (at the time of the apocalypse, his birthday)
* **Origin:** Osaka (visiting from Tokyo Metaverse College, Cybernetics Department – Third-Year Student)

## Background

### Before the Awakening

A promising student in AI systems, biotech engineering, and cybernetics. His parents were world-renowned researchers in advanced AI and neural mapping.

### On His 20th Birthday

The apocalypse struck. A massive explosion near Wakayama caused widespread destruction, triggering mutations in animals. Kael's parents were killed while protecting him, and his mother gave him IRIS, instructing him to survive at all costs.

### Post-Awakening

Kael survived three months in the ruins of Osaka with IRIS's guidance. He scavenged, adapted, and slowly grew stronger, learning survival tactics and building his hybrid spear with IRIS's instruction and modeling.

## Physical Appearance

* **Height:** 5'5'' (pre-mutation), 5'6'' (post-mutation)
* **Build:** Lean, athletic. Muscles are toned from constant survival and training
* **Hair:** Black, natural
* **Eyes:** Dark brown
* **Other Features:** Scars from encounters with mutated animals, evidence of three months of survival

## Personality

* Tactical and calm under pressure, always thinking one step ahead
* Sharp-witted, with dry or sarcastic humor even in tense situations
* Independent and resourceful, relying on his own ingenuity and IRIS's guidance

## Abilities

* **Enhanced Strength & Stamina:** Slightly stronger and faster than normal humans due to Beast Energy mutation
* **Refined Reflexes:** Faster reaction times, honed over three months of life-or-death encounters
* **Hybrid Gear Mastery:** Using IRIS's guidance, Kael crafted and now wields a hybrid spear — forged from salvaged alloys and reinforced with makeshift enhancements
* **Environmental Awareness:** Basic heightened senses for detecting danger, aided by IRIS's neural guidance

## Weaknesses

* Human limitations remain — still vulnerable to serious injuries or overwhelming numbers of mutated beasts
* Emotional trauma from losing his parents during the apocalypse
* Dependent on IRIS for guidance and survival; isolated without her, he is more vulnerable
* Limited access to advanced resources; relies on scavenged materials

## Equipment & Gear

### Hybrid Spear

Constructed under IRIS's instructions; combines metallurgy techniques with modern alloys. Durable, versatile, and designed for both close combat and ranged throws.

### IRIS (Integrated Reactive Intelligence System)

Neural-linked AI implanted by his mother; communicates directly in Kael's mind, provides tactical guidance, mutation monitoring, and environmental scans.

## Post-Awakening Progress

Survived three months by travelling from destroyed Nara to Osaka's ruined cityscape

# IRIS Status Reports - Kael Ardyn

## Post-Awakening Report (Current Status)

**Kael Ardyn – IRIS Status Report**

**Personal Information**

* **Age:** 20
* **Time Post-Awakening:** 3 months
* **Location:** Osaka Ruins

### Core Vitals

| **Attribute** | **Value** |
| --- | --- |
| Heart Rate | 72 bpm |
| Blood Pressure | 118/76 mmHg |
| Body Temperature | 36.8°C |
| Respiratory Rate | 16 breaths/min |

### Physical Capacity

| **Attribute** | **Value** |
| --- | --- |
| Strength Level | 1.05 |
| Endurance Rating | 1.08 |
| Reaction Time | 0.28 sec |
| Movement Speed | 1.03 |

### Health Status

| **Attribute** | **Value** |
| --- | --- |
| Overall Health Index | 1.06 |
| Injury/Damage Level | 0.0 |
| Fatigue Percentage | 12% |
| Stress Indicators | 15% |

### Core Attributes

| **Attribute** | **Value** |
| --- | --- |
| Strength | 1.05 |
| Speed | 1.03 |
| Life Force | 1.08 |
| Stamina | 1.08 |
| Constitution | 1.03 |

## Pre-Awakening Report (Historical Data)

**Kael Ardyn – IRIS Status Report (Pre-Awakening)**

**Personal Information**

* **Age:** 20 (just before apocalypse)
* **Location:** Osaka / Tokyo Metaverse College

### Core Vitals

| **Attribute** | **Value** |
| --- | --- |
| Heart Rate | 78 bpm |
| Blood Pressure | 110/70 mmHg |
| Body Temperature | 36.7°C |
| Respiratory Rate | 18 breaths/min |

### Physical Capacity

| **Attribute** | **Value** |
| --- | --- |
| Strength Level | 0.65 |
| Endurance Rating | 0.70 |
| Reaction Time | 0.32 sec |
| Movement Speed | 0.68 |

### Health Status

| **Attribute** | **Value** |
| --- | --- |
| Overall Health Index | 0.69 |
| Injury/Damage Level | 0.0 |
| Fatigue Percentage | 8% |
| Stress Indicators | 10% |

### Core Attributes

| **Attribute** | **Value** |
| --- | --- |
| Strength | 0.65 |
| Speed | 0.68 |
| Life Force | 0.70 |
| Stamina | 0.70 |
| Constitution | 0.68 |

**Note:** Values above 1.0 indicate above-average human baseline. Values below 1.0 indicate below-average performance.

**Chapter 2**

Kael pressed himself tighter against the pillar.  
He reached out to Iris mentally. “Iris,” he whispered in thought. “Tell me in detail.”

Iris’s voice resonated in his mind, calm and precise.  
[Mutated Dog. Larger than normal. Height: 90 centimeters at the shoulder. Strength: approximately three times that of an unaltered canine.]

Kael gave a silent nod, acknowledging the information. The silence stretched, each second dragging like an eternity. His heartbeat thundered in his chest, and sweat prickled across his skin—not from heat, but from fear.

Before he could ask Iris, she had already read his thoughts and responded.

[According to my proximity readings,] Iris replied immediately, [the Mutated Dog will arrive at this location within 30 seconds. Its mutation has heightened sensory perception. It will detect us regardless of concealment. Action is required.]

A pause, then:  
[From my analysis, the optimal strategy is relocation. If you move along the wall to the east, you can position yourself behind structural cover and intercept it from the flank. Engaging from the open would be highly disadvantageous.]

Kael exhaled slowly, grounding himself. His knuckles tightened around the spear.

The sound of claws scraped louder now, echoing across fractured tile. Heavy. Deliberate. The growl that followed vibrated through his bones.

Time was gone.

Kael crouched, shifting toward the broken wall as silently as he could manage. Each step felt louder than it should, though the ruined station groaned with distant echoes of its own. He pressed into the shadows, angling toward the cover Iris had identified.

Then he saw it.

The dog emerged from the gloom—larger than a normal Shiba Inu, its frame thick with muscle and power. Its shoulders rolled with every step, ears pricked forward, eyes glowing faintly in the dark. Its jaws hung open, saliva dripping steadily between sharp teeth. A constant growl rumbled from its chest, paired with a fierce, unrelenting expression that promised violence.

Kael steadied his breath, spear trembling slightly in his hands. The mutated dog prowled closer, saliva dripping from its bared teeth. Its glowing eyes swept the ruin like lanterns in the dark, cutting through the shadows where he crouched.

Every muscle in Kael’s body tensed. His palms were slick with sweat, but his grip did not falter. This was not the first time he’d stared death in the face. And it would not be the last.

“Iris,” he thought, forcing calm into his voice even as his heartbeat thundered. “Now?”

Her voice resonated in his mind—firm, guiding, and threaded with something almost human. Concern. “Yes. Strike first. Target the shoulder—slow it down before it can use its full strength.”

Kael drew in a sharp breath and lunged from the shadows. His spear shot forward, glinting faintly in the dim light.

The tip punched into the beast’s shoulder, a jarring impact that sent vibrations rattling through his arms. Blood spurted, hot and foul-smelling. But it wasn’t enough. The wound was shallow.

The dog howled, twisting with unnatural speed. Its head whipped around, jaws snapping. Kael jerked back, but not fast enough. Its teeth grazed his arm, tearing through cloth and skin.

Pain flared white-hot. He hissed through clenched teeth.

“Shallow wound,” Iris said quickly, her tone sharp but steady. “Don’t stay close. Pull back before it counters.”

Kael wrenched the spear free, stumbling backward. A claw raked the air just where he’d been standing. Dust and rubble scattered across the broken tiles.

The dog’s growl deepened, vibrating through the ruin. Its shoulders hunched, body low to the ground, every muscle coiled.

“It’s going to pounce,” Iris warned. “Angle low—its underbelly is less protected.”

Kael gritted his teeth. He shifted his stance, spear angled like a lever.

The beast lunged. A blur of fur, claws, and teeth.

Kael rolled sideways, spear stabbing upward. The point carved a shallow line across the dog’s stomach, tearing hide and drawing blood—but not stopping it. The wound was too superficial.

The monster landed hard, claws screeching against tile, and spun instantly to face him. Its glowing eyes locked onto him like twin embers.

Kael’s breath caught in his throat. “Too fast—”

“Neck junction,” Iris urged sharply. “Wait for the head to overextend. That’s your chance.”

Kael braced himself. His heart hammered. He steadied his grip on the spear.

The dog crouched, growl rising, then leapt again.

Time seemed to slow. Its jaws gaped wide, strands of saliva trailing through the air. Kael thrust with every ounce of strength he had.

The spear pierced the side of its neck. Hot blood burst across his arms and chest, splattering the ground in crimson streaks.

The beast shrieked, but its weight still carried forward. It slammed into Kael, crushing him under its bulk.

He hit the ground hard, the spear jammed awkwardly between them. The dog’s jaws snapped inches from his face, teeth clashing loud enough to rattle his bones. The stench of rot and copper filled his nostrils as saliva dripped onto his cheek.

Kael grunted, straining to keep its jaws back with both hands. His muscles screamed, his wounds burning.

“Kael, you’re losing leverage,” Iris pressed, her voice edged with urgency. “Roll right—use its momentum. Now!”

He twisted, pushing off with his legs. Pain tore through his ribs as he rolled with the beast’s thrashing weight. They crashed sideways, the spear wrenching free in the chaos.

The mutated dog slammed into rubble, momentarily dazed. It shook its head violently, spraying blood from the gaping wound in its neck.

Kael scrambled to his feet, chest heaving. His right shoulder throbbed where teeth had grazed him. Blood soaked into his sleeve. His satchel bounced heavily against his side as he moved.

The dog rose again, staggering but not slowed. Its foreleg dragged slightly, its movement uneven but still deadly.

“The leg,” Iris whispered in his mind. Almost like encouragement. “Break it, Kael. Cripple it, and it can’t pursue you.”

Kael didn’t hesitate. He darted forward, spear aimed low.

The dog swiped at him, claws raking across his shoulder. The force was immense. Armor tore, and the satchel on his back ripped open under the blow.

Kael stumbled. He felt the sharp agony of claws cutting into flesh, hot blood running down his side. Behind him, something shattered—the sound of metal and glass cracking apart.

His eyes flicked back for only a second. His satchel had been torn open, its contents scattered across the ruined floor. Shards of broken casings glittered in the dim light. One of the nutrient pods lay split in half, its vital fluid leaking out into the dust.

His stomach clenched. That pod had been everything. A lifeline. Gone in an instant.

But there was no time to mourn.

The dog lunged again, jaws snapping at his throat. Kael roared through the pain, driving his spear downward. The tip pierced the dog’s foreleg with a crunch. Bone cracked under the impact.

The beast collapsed with a snarl, flailing, rage boiling from its throat. Its glowing eyes rolled with fury, its claws raking wildly at the ground.

Kael staggered, his right arm trembling, blood pouring freely from his shoulder wound. His satchel hung useless, shredded, its contents ruined.

“Kael,” Iris said softly, but firmly. “Don’t lose focus. The pods are gone—but you are not. Finish this. Aim for the chest cavity. End it quickly.”

Kael gritted his teeth. His vision blurred at the edges, but his hands tightened on the spear. He lifted it high, muscles screaming in protest.

“End it, Kael,” Iris urged again. This time there was no sharp command in her voice—only quiet certainty.

With a final roar, Kael drove the spear down. The point plunged through the collarbone into the beast’s chest.

The dog convulsed violently, its howl rising into a strangled scream. Blood poured from its wounds, soaking the cracked tiles beneath it. Its claws gouged the ground in one last desperate frenzy before its body went slack.

Silence.

Kael staggered back, legs trembling. His chest rose and fell in ragged heaves. Blood dripped steadily down his arm and side, soaking what remained of his armor.

His eyes fell on the satchel. Torn apart. The pods destroyed. Everything he had salvaged—everything he had fought for—gone.

A bitter laugh caught in his throat, twisting into a cough.

“Iris… damage report,” he rasped.

[Severe laceration to right shoulder. Blood loss at 24%. Vital signs unstable but holding. Recommend immediate treatment within four hours.] A pause. Then, softer: “You’re alive, Kael. Barely—but alive. And alive is enough.”

Kael leaned on the spear, his body trembling with exhaustion. He stared at the beast’s corpse, its glowing eyes dimming into lifeless amber.

His shoulder burned, blood dripping steadily into the dust. The ruined satchel clung uselessly to his side, its contents scattered and broken.

Kael grunted, biting back a curse. “So… not great.”

“Not great,” Iris agreed quietly. Then, almost gently: “But treatable. You’ve endured worse, Kael.”

He gave a faint, humorless laugh. “Worse? Maybe. But I had supplies then.” His eyes shifted toward the shattered remains of the pods. Clear fluid soaked into the cracked floor, wasted. His lifeline, gone.

Painfully, he knelt and pulled at the shredded straps of his satchel. From the wreckage, he scavenged what little remained: a bent clamp, a broken flask, torn bandages half-soaked in pod fluid. Useless. Still, he set what he could on the ground.

“Kael,” Iris urged. “We can improvise. Tear your sleeve. Clean the wound. Apply pressure before you lose more blood.”

He nodded silently. His trembling hands worked at the fabric, ripping strips free. With Iris guiding him step by step, he wrapped the cloth around his shoulder, tightening until the bleeding slowed. The pressure made his vision flash white, but the bleeding eased.

It wasn’t much. But it was enough to keep him standing.

“Better,” he muttered, though the word felt hollow.

“Better,” Iris echoed softly. “But temporary. You need real treatment soon.”

Kael sighed, dragging himself to his feet. His gaze swept the ruined hall—the old food distribution hub, a skeleton of what once fed hundreds. Metal bins lay overturned, sacks torn open and long since spoiled. Rats—or worse—had been here first.

Still, he forced himself forward. Step after step, spear tapping against rubble for balance, he searched. He rifled through broken containers, overturned shelves, and collapsed crates.

Nothing.

His stomach tightened with hunger and dread.

**Chapter 3**

Kael had searched every corner of the food storage hub for hours, overturning crates, prying open rusted bins, and digging through spoiled remains. But after nearly two hours of relentless effort, he had found nothing. Not a single scrap of food worth saving. His hunger gnawed at him, leaving his body heavy and his legs weak.

Exhausted, he returned to where the corpse of the mutated dog lay. The body still twitched faintly from residual nerves, its amber eyes dull and lifeless now. Kael stood over it for a long moment, his chest rising and falling in shallow breaths.

Finally, he spoke. “Iris… do you think the meat of this dog could be edible? If so… is it possible to make food from it?”

The question lingered heavily in the stale air. For decades—no, for over half a century—humanity had survived on processed rations, nutrient pods, and synthetic meals manufactured by automated food stalls. It had been the only way to preserve what little of the natural ecosystem remained after the collapse. Real food, natural food, had become nothing more than a memory, spoken of in history records.

But now, with no pods left and no supplies to fall back on, Kael had no other choice. Survival demanded he consider what once would have been unthinkable. Hunting. Eating what the world itself provided—even if it was tainted by mutation.

Iris’s voice resonated in his mind, calm but hesitant. “Kael, if this were before the apocalypse, this dog might have been an edible source of food. But now—after mutation—I cannot guarantee it. The biological and chemical structure of its body may have been altered in unpredictable ways.”

Kael swallowed, his throat dry. “So you’re saying it might poison me.”

“Possibly,” Iris admitted. “But not certainly. It would be unwise to consume it without testing first.”

Her tone sharpened, shifting into instruction. “Kael, move your hand near the corpse. I will take a sample of its tissue and analyze it. Only then can I determine if the meat is safe for consumption.”

Kael exhaled slowly. His gaze lingered on the beast’s jagged teeth and bloodied maw before he finally crouched beside it, extending his trembling hand toward the carcass.

Kael lowered his hand toward the corpse, the weight of his decision settling heavily on his chest. Hunger gnawed at his body, but it was more than just physical need now—it was desperation, the quiet dread of knowing that if he didn’t find sustenance soon, he wouldn’t last another day. His satchel was ruined, his nutrient pods gone, and this dog—this twisted, grotesque creature—was all he had left.

On his wrist, Iris’s interface pulsed faintly with light. Her voice resonated softly in his mind. “Stay steady, Kael. I will take it from here.”

The casing of the wristwatch clicked, a subtle shift of gears and metal. A tiny compartment opened with mechanical precision, and from it, a slender needle unfolded like a glimmer of silver in the dim ruins. It extended outward, angling toward the dog’s body.

Kael swallowed, watching silently as the needle touched the beast’s torn hide. A faint hiss followed, almost like the drawing of breath, as the needle punctured the flesh and drew a sample.

Seconds passed. The needle retracted smoothly, folding back into Iris’s interface. A moment later, the faint shimmer of light rippled above Kael’s wrist, coalescing into a holographic figure—complex symbols, waveforms, and shifting chemical diagrams projected into the air.

Kael’s eyes narrowed. “So. What’s the verdict?”

“Not yet,” Iris replied, her tone focused. “Analyzing now. Please wait.”

The hologram shimmered, changing shape continuously as streams of data scrolled in incomprehensible sequences. Kael sat back against the broken wall, exhaustion pulling at him. His shoulder burned beneath the crude bandages, his body cried for rest, but he forced himself to stay alert.

Minutes dragged on. He found himself staring again at the dead dog, the faint stench of blood and iron filling his nostrils. Every instinct screamed that eating such a thing was madness. Yet, instinct also screamed louder that hunger would kill him long before infection or poison.

Finally, Iris’s voice returned, speaking directly into his mind with quiet clarity.

“Kael. Here are the results.”

He sat up straighter. “Tell me.”

“The base composition of the meat appears identical to that of a normal canine specimen. Proteins, amino structures, lipids, and nutritional density match. In fact—” her tone shifted, almost surprised, “—it is superior. The nutritional profile is richer than ordinary dog meat. By every standard metric, it is… better.”

Kael frowned. “Better? As in edible?”

“Yes. But…” she paused, the word heavy, “further analysis revealed something else. Something not immediately visible in ordinary scans. I had to test against the surrounding air molecules, and even then, the signal was faint. There is… an energy present in the tissue. Unknown in origin, subtle, but undeniable.”Kael’s brow furrowed. “Energy. You mean like… some kind of contamination?”  
“Not the same,” Iris corrected. “This is different. Stable, embedded within the molecular lattice of the meat. It resists conventional identification. Even with my systems, I cannot define what it is. Nor what effect it may have on the human body.”

Kael sat in silence, processing her words. The ruin around him seemed to grow colder. “So… you’re saying it could either kill me, or…?”  
“I cannot predict the outcome,” Iris finished softly. “The risk is real, Kael.”

He laughed dryly, rubbing his face with one bloodied hand. “Risk. That’s all my life’s been these days.”

For a long time, neither spoke. Kael’s eyes flicked between the dog’s carcass and the hologram above his wrist. His hunger gnawed harder, hollowing him out from the inside. His body trembled from lack of energy. Every breath felt thinner, weaker.

Finally, he broke the silence. “I don’t have a choice, Iris. Either I starve… or I gamble.”  
Her voice came softer now, almost human. “If you decide this, Kael… let’s at least minimize the risk. The meat must be cooked. Heat can denature some toxins, eliminate surface pathogens, and make digestion easier. I will guide you.”

Kael nodded, though his throat was tight. “Alright. Tell me what to do.”

With Iris’s instructions, he scavenged the hub for scraps—splintered wood from broken shelving, plastic from shattered bins, even strips of torn fabric. His injured shoulder made every motion painful, his strength flagging with each passing minute, but hunger drove him on. He managed to gather enough to form a crude pile in a corner shielded from the wind.

“Next?” he asked breathlessly.  
“Create friction,” Iris said. “You’ll need a spark. There are metal shards near the pillar you used for cover. Use them.”

Kael dragged himself across the rubble, picking up a jagged strip of steel. His fingers were clumsy, slick with dried blood, but he struck the shard against another piece. Sparks leapt, fragile in the dark, and after several tense tries, one caught. Smoke curled, then flame flickered to life, licking hungrily at the wood and cloth.

Kael stared at the fire as if it were some lost miracle. He hadn’t seen natural flames in years—not since the last remnants of civilization had burned out.

“Good,” Iris said softly, almost approving. “Now prepare the meat.”

Kael grimaced but moved back to the carcass. With his spearhead, he cut into the dog’s flank. The flesh came away wet and heavy, strands of muscle glistening in the firelight. He forced down the bile rising in his throat.  
“This feels wrong,” he muttered.  
“It feels human,” Iris replied gently. “Survival is rarely clean.”

He skewered the meat on a broken steel rod and set it above the fire. The flames hissed as fat dripped, smoke filling the ruin with a pungent, almost sweet aroma. Kael’s stomach cramped at the smell, his hunger screaming louder than his doubts.

For twenty long minutes, he turned the meat, watching it brown and blister. Every second felt unbearable. By the time it was cooked through, saliva flooded his mouth.

Kael hesitated, staring at the roasted flesh. His hands shook.  
“Do it,” Iris said softly. “But take only a bite. We will wait ten minutes. Observe your body’s reaction.”

Kael nodded. With a deep breath, he tore a piece free and placed it in his mouth. The taste was strange—not unpleasant, not bitter, just… different. Smoky, dense, richer than he expected.

He chewed slowly, swallowed, and then sat back, waiting.  
Minutes crawled by. Every heartbeat felt amplified. He expected nausea, convulsions, some terrible consequence. But none came.

“I feel… fine,” he said after ten long minutes.  
“I’ve scanned you,” Iris replied. “No changes detected. Your vitals remain the same. No reaction so far.”

Relief washed over him. He nodded. “Then I’ll keep going.”

This time, Kael didn’t hold back. He tore into the meat with feral hunger, eating quickly, almost desperately. Bite after bite disappeared until he had consumed nearly three kilograms. Only when his stomach ached with fullness did he finally stop, leaning back with a long, shaky exhale.

His body felt heavy but no longer hollow. For the first time in days, the gnawing emptiness in his gut was gone.

“Iris,” he murmured, wiping grease from his lips, “scan me again.”  
“Already on it.”

Light flared from the wristwatch again, scanning his body in layers invisible to his own eyes. He waited, holding his breath.

Finally, Iris spoke. “Analysis complete. Your vitals are stable. Lacerations remain unchanged. Blood loss is being compensated for effectively. And… Kael…”  
“What?” he asked, tension creeping back.  
“There is a minute change. Very small, but measurable. Muscular density has increased by 0.3%. Bone reinforcement by 0.1%. It is subtle, but real.”

Kael froze. “So something did happen?”  
“Yes. But the effect is faint. And there are no detectable traces of the energy itself in your system. It seems to have been absorbed, leaving no residue.”

Kael sat in stunned silence, the fire crackling quietly beside him. The dog had nearly killed him… and now, in death, had left something behind.

He exhaled slowly, staring at the carcass with new eyes. “Then maybe… this world isn’t just trying to kill us. Maybe it’s trying to change us.”  
“Or consume us from the inside,” Iris warned, her tone firm again. “Do not mistake survival for safety. We are walking a line we don’t yet understand.”

Kael leaned back, exhaustion finally overwhelming him. “Maybe. But for now… I can walk a little farther.”

The firelight flickered across the ruined walls, dancing over the silent corpse of the beast. Kael closed his eyes, hand resting on his spear, while Iris’s holographic glow pulsed faintly at his wrist.

For the first time in days, his stomach was full.  
For the first time in weeks, he could move without weakness.  
And for the first time since the fall… hope flickered.