The Neurodivergent Gamer's Glossary

I use various gaming-related metaphors and analogies throughout the book; here is a handy reference guide.

- **AuDHD:** Pronounced "aw" DHD. While not an official label by any means, AuDHD is often used in online spaces by people who are diagnosed with both autism and ADHD.

- **bandwidth:** This is the amount of energy and endurance a person has to work with to get through their day. Bandwidth can vary from person to person, some people being low energy, some high.

- **buff:** In games, a buff is something that helps the character in some way, but isn't always permanent. In this book, the same meaning applies—a buff is when something in particular is at least temporarily helpful to the neurodivergent person, like an accommodation or medication.

- **build/build class/player build:** In games, a player's character build describes the type of play style they will most likely engage in, based on the stats the player has assigned to the character when creating them. In this book, I refer to neurotypical player builds, as well as ASD, ADHD, and AuDHD player builds, because the way our brains work informs our stats, which, in turn, defines our "play style" (the way we function) in real life. See Chapter Three: Stats and Player Builds for more detailed information.

- **burnout:** The result of an accumulation of stress, overwhelm, and exhaustion from everyday activities, burnout leaves a person's energy depleted, and lowers their threshold to be able to function and perform their normal tasks.

- **clan:** A group of players brought together by common interests or goals. Clan size can range from as small as a Family Unit, to as large as a multinational organization.

- **debuff:** In games, a debuff is something that hinders a character in some way, but is not always permanent. In this book, the same meaning applies—a debuff is when something in particular hinders a neurodivergent person. For example: if an ASD player whose Bandwidth is already low

is forced to socialize or attend a crowded event, a debuff is applied to their Bandwidth, and their threshold for Meltdown or Burnout status is lowered.

- **default settings:** The original player model a person is born into, both genetically and based on societal, family, and religious norms and expectations. A typically wired (NT) brain is assumed, by society in general, to be the default brain.

- **game modes (Casual, Easy, Normal, Hard, Legendary):** Old-school video games often didn't have game modes, and the gameplay was set at the same difficulty level for everyone. Modern games often have the ability for players to change their difficulty settings, depending on how challenging or relaxing they want their gameplay experience to be. Different games call their difficulty levels by different names, but the settings often range from Story Mode, Casual, or Very Easy, where the focus is more on the story being told in the game rather than the challenge of defeating enemies, to Very Hard, Legendary, or Insanity, where the focus is on defeating very buffed enemies who seem like bullet sponges.

In this book, I liken the ease or difficulty of navigating through life to these different game modes.

- **level/level up:** In games, a player's character "levels up" when they hit a certain threshold of experience points (known colloquially as XP), which are usually earned by either completing missions or defeating enemies.

Because people don't earn XP in real life, in this book, I count each year of a player's life as one completion of the XP meter. Therefore, a player's level is their age, and they level up on their birthday. When I use the terms low-level, mid-level, or high-level, I am basically talking about kids to young adults as low-level, people from their mid-twenties to their fifties as mid-level, and people sixty and beyond as high-level. If you see the term "noob," this is an old gaming term that was born from calling very low-level players newbies. In this book, I use the term noob to mean infants to toddlers.

- **Life.exe:** A reimagining of our mundane existence (you know, life) as that of a video game, where each individual is a player character, and their ultimate life goals, hopes, and ambitions are their Main Quest. There are no winners or losers in Life.exe. The focus of the game is for each player to enjoy their playthrough and find meaning in their quests and their interactions with their parties and clans.

- **MMORPG:** This stands for for Massive(ly) Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game. Players from around the world can log on and interact with each other and the game world, often choosing to party up with other players and work together to complete missions.

- **neurodivergent (ND):** This label is used to describe someone whose brain is not wired to work in the way a typical/default brain works, which often leads to the ND person presenting with disability. There are many types of neurodivergence,

but in this book in particular, the terms "neurodivergent" or "ND" are primarily used to mean players with ASD, ADHD, or AuDHD.

- **neurotypical (NT):** Someone whose brain functions in the typical manner. Most humans are assumed to be neurotypical by default. In fact, prior to being diagnosed as neurodivergent, ND players are often judged by others as "failed" or "broken" neurotypicals who just need to try harder.

- **party:** In typical multiplayer video games, a party is usually a group of up to four players who band together to complete quests. Often they will chat over mic or with keyboard. For the purposes of this book, a party is a group of two or more players (usually less than ten) who often socialize and complete small quests together. Think a Family Unit or a close group of friends.

- **player character:** You. Or someone else. Every human individual in Life.exe is a player character. Every player character has their own sentience, will, motivations, goals, dreams, and of course, their own Main Quest. There are no mindless NPCs in Life.exe. Everyone is playing the game to the best of their ability.

- **spawn:** For the purposes of this book, spawn is the act of bringing a noob into the world of Life.exe. Depending on context, it can either mean to have a baby, or to be born.

- **spec/specced:** A character's specs are their specializations, strengths, attributes, and abilities. In games, these can often be assigned by the player during character creation. For the purposes of this book, a player is born already specced, because specs in Life.exe are based on the player's build being either neurotypical or neurodivergent.

- **traits/neurodivergent traits:** I prefer to use the term "traits" as a replacement for the word "symptoms." "Symptoms" makes it sound as if our neurodivergences are some kind of malady or disease, rather than just how we are. For example, I would say that the propensity of some ASD builds to line up objects is a trait of their autism, not a symptom of it.

CHAPTER ONE

Welcome to Life.exe

Imagine, if you will, a procedurally generated, open world MMORPG, in which the quest objectives are often vague, as well as different for every player. The game has a real-money economy, based on a credit score that you can't influence unless you already have credit. You have no control over the race or biological sex of your player character, and there are no rerolls, so you can only play the randomized character you are given when you log in for the first (and only) time. While you may be used to MMORPGs that let you decide your own stat spread, this one randomizes your stats as well as your appearance—and very few players get God-rolls. Most players end up with fairly evenly distributed, average stats.

There are others, however, whose stats are unevenly distributed, causing them to start the game with penalties in some areas (but often also with bonuses in other areas). Players who are assigned these spiky profiles may find it a struggle to keep up, in certain situations, with same-level players who rolled average stats. That is because this MMORPG is primarily designed for the players with average stats in mind when it comes to having the optimal gameplay experience. Second chances to complete failed quests are rare in this game, as there is no autosave feature, or even any save points.

The game? It's called Life.exe, and you are already playing it. (Surprise!) If you've picked up this guidebook, you're likely one of the group of players with unevenly distributed stats who start the game with penalties, which, of course, can make gameplay much more difficult than it is for those with less spiky profiles. There are names for these two statistically different groups of players: those with average, well-balanced stats are **neurotypical** (NT), and those with unevenly distributed stats are **neurodivergent** (ND). Welcome to the Neurodivergent Gamer's Guide to Life.exe, which is...well, it's what it says on the tin. A guidebook for neurodivergent gamers.

Navigating Life.exe as a neurodivergent player can feel like you're stuck doing a Hard, or even Legendary playthrough, while many neurotypical players seem to breeze through the game on Casual. This book is designed to help you even the playing field, so to speak. Because there are no rerolls in

Life.exe, ND players have to adapt to a world not designed with them in mind, make the best of the player character they've been given, and develop a play style that works for them. To that end, this guidebook includes a number of work-arounds and tricks that can help ND players navigate Life.exe with more ease, so that they can enjoy their playthrough and successfully complete their Main Quest, despite the uneven stats and penalties they were saddled with at the start of the game.

My name is Erin, and I'm here to help you make sense of this player's handbook.

Although there are many different "flavors" of neurodivergence, my primary neurodivergencies are autism and ADHD, so they will be the ones I focus on in this guide. I've been playing this game for a while now, and through trial and error (so, so much error), I have come across the tips and tricks included in this strategy guide. Though there is no magical cheat code you can input to reroll your player character, I hope the information on the available perks and buffs contained in this guide will help you have more fun playing Life.exe, while avoiding the (many, many) errors I encountered along the way.

Like Bringing a Stun Gun to a Plasma Rifle Fight

A loose (okay, very loose) definition of a neurodivergence is: a condition resulting from the way your brain just is. How you're wired, so to speak. You are wired differently than the players with average, well-balanced stats. One might even say—divergently. Your brain wiring diverges from that of the neurotypical brain.

What does neurotypical mean, then? Pretty much what it says on the tin. It means one's brain is typical in its wiring and functioning. It is what society thinks of as the "default brain." Everyone is presumed to be neurotypical unless proven otherwise. This is one reason undiagnosed neurodivergent players tend to struggle so much with self-hatred and internalized ableism—when everyone believes you are neurotypical but you show neurodivergent traits, those traits are often assumed to be character flaws, instead of evidence of a disability.

DID YOU KNOW?

It is common to have co-morbid neurodivergencies. That is, to have more than one. For example, my co-morbidities are autism and ADHD. These neurodivergencies occur together often enough that their names have been combined, in online parlance, into the term "AuDHD."

For the sake of brevity, from here on out I will sometimes refer to the specific types