Ascent

by
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FADE IN:

INT. WESTFIELD'S OFFICE - DAY

JEBEDIAH WESTFIELD, 45, well-dressed and meticulous, stands in front of an ornate desk in a well-furnished, large office. A pistol hangs mounted on the wall. At the far end of the office, an signal beeps, and double-doors open on a large elevator.

From the elevator emerges DOUGLAS RIKER, 34, scruffy and hardened, with a look of grim determination. He wears a miner's garb, including a flashlight-helmet, and a pickax on his back.

WESTFIELD
Ah, Mr. Riker, so glad you could make it.

Westfield shakes Riker's hand.

WESTFIELD
Everything's going well, I trust? No undue stress on you and your team? Good, good.

Westfield paces over to a large, shiny rock on his desk.

WESTFIELD
I hear your team was quite close to reaching a lusitanium deposit yesterday. I imagine you could reach it today if you set out soon.

Westfield walks towards the elevator and gestures towards it.

WESTFIELD
Here's what we'll do. You head down and extract the lusitanium, bring it back up to me, and we'll call it a day.

Riker walks into the elevator.

WESTFIELD
Best of luck, Doug. See you in a few hours.

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INT. WESTFIELD'S MINE, ACTIVE SECTION - DAY

Riker steps out of the elevator into a rocky mine tunnel. As he does so, the lights around him flicker and the ground shakes.

Riker tries to maintain his footing, but a cave-in ensues. He tumbles into a chasm.

INT. ABANDONED MINE SECTION - DAY

Riker emerges into an abandoned section of the mine that was stripped of all minerals long ago.

Without any weapons, Riker wanders through eerie, abandoned corridors. As he progresses, he observes a mysterious, glowing substance coating the walls.

At first, the substance shows up in small scatterings, but soon it begins to concentrate. Eventually, Riker comes across a circular chamber coated with the substance - and inhabited by a gruesome monster.

Riker runs from the monster, and after ducking down a narrow passage, a small rock slide blocks the monster's passage.

After Riker wanders through a few more corridors, he encounters another monster. This time, though, he spots a rusty pickax, and is able to use the pickax to defeat the monster.

Shortly thereafter, Riker finds a static-riddled intercom that allows him to communicate with Westfield.

WESTFIELD
Hello? Riker, is that you? Oh, thank God you're all right. Listen, we're not sure what caused the elevator to malfunction, but we think it was some kind of cave-in. I can barely hear you. There should be an old mine entrance close to your position. Just follow the tunnels. And if you find a better intercom, contact me again.

Riker continues his journey through the abandoned tunnels, fighting monsters any time he enters a room with the strange substance on the walls.

Riker comes across another intercom, but this one appears to be broken. Eventually, though, he hears a faint voice.

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LESLIE
Hello? Hello! There's someone there, right? Please don't leave. You're Riker, aren't you? My name is Leslie Ramirez. I'm a mineralogist here. There's been a cave-in, and I'm trapped at the lab. I can't contact Manager Westfield. When you get back to the surface, send a rescue team down for me, please!

Later in the level, Riker comes across two more intercoms; first a broken one, then a functional one. On the broken one, he is able to talk with Leslie:

LESLIE
Riker, is that you? Let me ask you something. Have you seen a strange, glowing substance anywhere? I've seen it before. It's called *Acremonium lusitanium* - Lusitanium mold. That's what I've named it, anyway. I've never seen a bioluminescent mold before, but I guess we should be prepared for anything. I managed to procure a small sample. I'll let you know what it does when I find out.

On the functional intercom, Riker is able to talk to Westfield:

WESTFIELD
Good to hear your voice again, Doug. You're almost at the exit. Let me ask you something: have you noticed a strange, glowing mold? I had learned that such a thing might be growing in some older sections of the mine, but I never imagined... never mind. We can talk about it later. Just get back to the surface safely. I'll start the sequence to... huh? What the... that can't be right. My scanners are reporting an atmospheric breach. Let me get back to you. Keep going.

The intercom buzzes out into static. During the level, Riker finds a Flare Gun, which helps him in defeating more powerful enemies.

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Riker encounters another broken intercom:

LESLIE
Riker? Listen to me, OK? I've got something important to tell you. I've been studying the lusitanium mold, and you're not going to like what I've found. The mold is a hallucinogen, and a damn powerful one at that. If you've been seeing anything strange, anything out of the ordinary? It's not real. It can't hurt you. Not physically, anyway. Mentally, though... just steer clear of the mold. Be careful.

After defeating many enemies and traversing a long distance, Riker comes to a huge doorway with an intercom and a broken pneumatic tube. Westfield speaks via the intercom:

WESTFIELD
Doug? Doug, listen to me --

The sound of a man getting punched emanates from the intercom. Westfield screams. A new voice, that of LYLE ZUCCO, silky and menacing, comes over the intercom.

ZUCCO
Ah, Mr. Riker is it? So sorry about the door. My ship made a little, shall we say, *tear* in the atmospheric bubble surrounding the mine.

WESTFIELD
Tear? He blew the thing damn near in half!

ZUCCO
Keep him quiet!

Another punch sound.

ZUCCO
Now my friend, I'm in a bad position. I'm a salesman of certain... recreational substances.

WESTFIELD
Salesman? Drug lord is more like it!

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ZUCCO
I'm sure my boys offworld would love to have a look at that fungus you've found. Now unfortunately, the exit you're at goes directly to the surface and right now you might find the atmosphere somewhat inhospitable. So here's what you're gonna do: back in the main section of the mines, there's another exit that goes to the mine's office complex. You get me a sample of mold from the lab, I open the door for you, your boss goes free. Do we have an understanding?

WESTFIELD
Don't listen to him, Riker. There's no telling what this freak would do with --

ZUCCO
Good God, will you shut your mouth, Westfield? Look, Mr. Riker, you know what you've got to do. This little conversation's over.

The intercom shuts off. Riker continues through the level until he stumbles down a slippery path that lands him in the unexplored depths of the asteroid.

INT. UNEXPLORED CAVERNS - DAY

Riker explores the depths of the asteroid, encountering more powerful enemies and greater quantities of mold as he goes. There are no signs of human habitation, and as a result, no new equipment and no intercoms.

The path is circuitous and labyrinthine. Riker tramps through shallow pools of water and cramped circular chambers.

Eventually, Riker makes his way to an incline, at the end of which he finds a crack in the wall. He squeezes through and finds himself back in the mine proper.

INT. WESTFIELD'S MINE, ACTIVE SECTION - DAY

Riker finds himself back in the active part of the mine, complete with working lights and technology. He finds a broken intercom:

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LESLIE
Hello? It can't be... Riker. You're still trapped in the mine? Of course you are. I've been monitoring the transmissions between you and Westfield - and Zucco. You went incommunicado for a while and I thought - well, never mind. We have to focus on saving Westfield now. My lab is just up ahead. Come and meet me, and we'll work out what to do.

At this point, Riker finds a shiny pickax, much like the one he lost at the beginning of the game. This replaces the old, rusty one and makes him considerably stronger.

Riker comes to a great gap in the ground. Across the way, he can see the lab, but has no way to reach it. He finds himself next to an intercom:

ZUCCO
You see the lab yet, friend? Now some of our readings here indicate that it may be inaccessible from your current position. I guess you'll just have to be resourceful. Remember, your dear boss's life depends on it. Tick-tock.

Riker comes across a cache of explosives and a broken intercom:

LESLIE
You see those explosives, Riker? My charts show that there's a natural cavern on the other side of this rock face. I don't know what you'll find, but just remember: it's all in your head. Whatever you see, however real it seems, it isn't real. It can't hurt you. Don't let it.

Riker picks up the explosives and uses one to blast away the rock face.

INT. SIDE TUNNEL - DAY

The side tunnel is teeming with mold, and consequently, monsters. After navigating a long path with an upwards incline, Riker finds a grate that leads down into the active section of the mine.

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INT. WESTFIELD'S MINE, ACTIVE SECTION - DAY

Riker drops to the floor from the ceiling above, right next to a broken intercom:

LESLIE
You're still alive. That's good. You're actually on the other side of the lab now; it should be right behind you. Now I have the mold sample, but there's something we have to think about. This mold is an unbelievably powerful hallucinogen, as you've seen firsthand. Zucco may just want to make some money, but what about his clientele? Zucco can do incredible damage with this stuff, and he doesn't know - or doesn't care. Is Westfield's life really worth that? Are ours? (*Beat*) Just come and meet me, please. We'll figure this out.

Riker turns around and makes his way to the lab.

Outside of Leslie's lab, Riker encounters one more broken intercom:

LESLIE
Riker? I want to help Westfield as much as you do, but... this organism can't move or think. It's barely even alive. But think of how many lives it could claim. It's too much power for one person, but... I trust you, Riker. More than myself, at any rate. If you want it, it's yours.

Riker enters the lab.

INT. LESLIE'S LABORATORY - DAY

Riker enters an empty laboratory. The lab is teeming with mold, particularly one against the far wall. He examines the mold. Leslie stands behind him.

Leslie is pretty, although somewhat short and chubby. She wears a white lab coat and carries a clipboard. Riker approaches Leslie. His perception blurs as he does.

A flash of light ensues, and in Leslie's place stands a huge monster.

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LESLIE
Riker... however real it seems, it isn't real!

Leslie attacks, and a boss fight ensues. Riker emerges victorious. He discovers a vial containing a mold sample, and takes an alternate exit from the lab.

INT. WESTFIELD'S MINE, ACTIVE SECTION - DAY

Upon exiting the lab, Riker comes across a still-functional rivet gun and adds it to his arsenal.

Riker comes across another mine exit: a huge, double-door with an intercom and a pneumatic tube. The intercom addresses him:

ZUCCO
Mr. Riker. So good to hear from you once again. I trust that your journey hasn't been too... taxing? If you have a sample for me, your boss goes free. Now, I know what you're thinking: why trust Lyle Zucco, when the luminous Mr. Westfield thinks so little of him? Well, quite simply, friend, you don't have much of a choice. Without my say-so, this door doesn't open. So hand over the sample, and we'll see what happens.

Riker sends the test tube up the pneumatic tube. A short while later, Zucco speaks again:

ZUCCO
Phenomenal. Simply phenomenal. All right, friend. I'll meet you halfway. Your boss gets to go free...

As he speaks, his voice transforms into that of Westfield.

WESTFIELD
But the door stays closed. Apologies for the deception, Doug, but I needed your full cooperation. I've had my eye on this for a long time, but an expedition into the depths of the mine to pick up a drug? No one would have gone along with it.
(MORE)

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WESTFIELD (CONT'D)
So I caused a little cave-in and let my faithful friend do the rest. We’ve known each other a long time, so you deserve the truth. Lyle Zucco is a persona I use to sell drugs off-world, and this lusitanium mold is going to be the most potent one yet. Oh, don’t worry, I’m not going to leave you down there. This door is programmed to open twelve hours from now, by which time I will be long gone. Perhaps I’ll get in touch with you again sometime. Thanks for all the help.

Riker continues further down the path and notices a huge hole in the wall, leading to a rushing river.

INT. UNDERGROUND RIVER - NIGHT

Riker steps into the river and the current sweeps him along. The water is filled with shimmering mold.

During this section, Riker must go with the flow of the current and avoid hazards such as rocks and monsters. Additionally, he must surface for oxygen every so often.

Riker occasionally emerges into large, cavernous chambers where he must fight monsters and find his way back into another section of the river.

At the end of the section, Riker escapes from the river just before it hurries him off the edge into a waterfall.

INT. MINERAL CHAMBER - NIGHT

Riker arrives at the site where he was supposed to go in the beginning: a series of chambers teeming with lusitanium. There is an intercom:

WESTFIELD
Riker? You sly devil! You’ve found your way back to the entrance. Very clever, partner. Very clever indeed. I imagine you’re not so happy that I put you in danger for my own gain. I can respect that. Tell you what: I’ll open the lock to my office. If you make your way here, we’ll... talk it out.

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Riker makes his way through the final section of the mine. The mold synced up with the lusitanium makes the most challenging and grotesque monsters yet.

Riker encounters another intercom:

WESTFIELD
You know lusitanium isn't that valuable anymore. The only way I could keep this mine operational - the only way I could keep my employees and their families *fed* - was to sell drugs on the side. In the wrong hands, the lusitanium mold could bring galactic civilization to its knees, forever frozen in a mass hysteria. But what of it?

Westfield pants, overwrought.

WESTFIELD
I have no responsibility for the rest of the galaxy; I have a responsibility to my company and my personnel. Would you have acted any differently, Doug? Would you?

Riker comes to the elevator shaft where the elevator crashed at the beginning of his adventure. The elevator itself lies far below, but the auxiliary ladder is accessible. An intercom sits next to the control panel:

WESTFIELD
It doesn't have to come to this. We could work this out. What do you want? Money? A passage off-world? No, no, I know you. You can't be bought off so easily. You want something intangible. Revenge. Justice. Maybe just an explanation. You can have what you want, but I will not give it to you. You'll have to pry it from my cold, dead hands.

INT. ELEVATOR SHAFT - NIGHT

Riker ascends the elevator shaft via the ladder. He arrives at the entrance to Westfield's office.

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INT. WESTFIELD'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Westfield stands in the center of his office and gazes at Riker as he enters. A tank of quickly-reproducing mold now sits on his desk.

WESTFIELD
Welcome back, my friend. I did my best to stop you, but we both knew it would come to this. I wronged you, but I offer no apology. You know why I did what I did. You would have acted differently in my place? Then show me. Show me!

Westfield draws two pistols and opens fire. Riker grabs the pistol from the wall and a gunfight ensues. Westfield is much faster and stronger than Riker, but Riker hides behind cover and manages to emerge victorious.

Upon defeat, Westfield screams in agony, and shoots the tank of mold. The mold explodes across the whole room, and Riker's vision blurs.

EXT. STARRY EXPANSE - NIGHT

A whirling star field replaces Westfield's office. Westfield groans and transforms into a gigantic, gruesome beast. Riker wields his pickax and confronts Westfield for the last time.

Upon defeat, the Westfield-creature makes unholy, inhuman shrieks, and explodes. The screen goes white.

INT. WESTFIELD'S OFFICE - DAY

Riker wakes up to find himself back in Westfield's office. Westfield's body lies across from him, motionless and lifeless. All of the mold has disappeared.

Riker walks over to the computer, and reads a message flashing on the screen: "MOLD COLLECTED. MANY THANKS - L."

Riker looks towards the opposite end of the office, which houses an elevator that goes to the surface. Riker enters the elevator and presses a button. The doors close in front of him.

FADE OUT

CREDITS

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