Night in the Homestuck

by **Legend0fTacoHat**

Summary

Mae receives a message from someone and is told to download a mysterious file containing a game which should supposedly save her and her friends from the end of the world. Mae agrees and gathers up a group consisting of her, Gregg, Bea, Angus, Germ, Lori, Selmers, and Bombshell to play with her. What is this game and who is the person who contacted Mae and her friends?

Notes

Hi, this is Legend0fTacoHat. This is my first fanfiction, (which would explain why I couldn't come up with a better title), so I hope you enjoy. I will be posting three chapters today because I've already started posting on Fanfiction.net. After this, I will post every Friday if all goes well. I look forward to hearing your feedback. This work was partially inspired by the possum players against the black goat of the ether reality by whitestarbreaker. [http://archiveofourown.org/works/11529348/chapters/25881204](http://archiveofourown.org/works/11529348/chapters/25881204)

- Inspired by [the possum players against the black goat of the ether reality](http://archiveofourown.org/works/11529348/chapters/25881204) by whitestarbreaker
Mae woke with a start. She had just finished going through another of her strange dreams. After the incident with the cult, her dreams continued, but without the presence of any large, spiritual animals at the end. This one ended differently, though. Mae had wandered around and found the musicians as usual, but the song they played was an eerie jumble of nothing. There was no song, just noise. Once all the musicians had been found, she made her way back to the start of the dream. Mae had expected to be forced to wait there until she woke up, but instead, she was met with the tall, shadowy outline of what looked like a goat. The landscape faded into shapes, then darkness. Clutching her head, Mae attempted to block out the sound of the song becoming louder. She eventually collapsed and woke up.

After calming down and processing her dream for a bit, Mae got up and got dressed. Upon opening her laptop, she found messages from all her friends, except Angus, who usually only left an away message. That wasn’t on her mind, though, as she also had a message from an anonymous user. Their profile pic was some sort of green slime creature. She honestly thought it was adorable. Mae(MB) opened the chat, slightly scared that it would be some sort of hacker or maybe even one of those strange, “not for children”, sites from before Angus fixed her computer.

GT: Message me back AS SOON as you get up, it’s very important.

MB: Who are you?

GT: That’s not important right now, what’s important is getting you and your friends out before you’re all dead.

MB: What? Why would we die?

Mae immediately wondered if this stranger knew about the cult or if this had anything to do with them.

GT: You don’t have enough time left for me to explain what’s going on. You just need to trust me and download these files.

Attached were two files, both labeled with, “SBURB”.

GT: You also need to send these to anyone who you want to survive. You only have about three and a half hours left, so you need to hurry.

Mae was skeptical of this person who said she would die if she didn’t download these very suspicious files, but she couldn’t shake the feeling that this may have something to do with the black goat or the cult, so she decided, against her better judgment, to download them.

GT: Good. Now we can get started.

MB: Wait. How did you know I downloaded the files?

GT: That’s also gonna have to be saved for later. Your main priority now should be assembling your group that you want to keep alive.

MB: Shouldn’t I send it to everyone, then?

GT: You don’t have time for that, but anyone in the houses of whoever you send these files to will
have a chance at survival.

MB: What’s this file supposed to do anyways?

GT: It’s a game called, “SBURB”. It’s complicated to start, so leave it alone for now and go gather up your group. We can create a group chat and I’ll walk you through how to enter the game.

MB: Okay, but one last thing. What’s your name?


Mae copied the files onto a USB and made her way downstairs. Getting ready took about 30 minutes. It was 5 o’clock. Before Mae was ready to leave. The game started in 3 hours. That meant that both of her parents would be home when it did. As she threw her winter coat on, her mother called to her,

“Mae, honey, are you leaving already?”

“Yeah, sorry. I’ve got things I need to do.”, Mae replied hurriedly.

“Okay, sweetie, just be careful. Spring may be coming but winters still got some snow left to give us as well as some very slippery sidewalks.”

“I will, mom.”

“Bye, Mae.”

“Bye, mom.”

Mae was sprinting down the sidewalk. As she ran, she thought about who to bring. Gregg, Bea, and Angus, of course, but who else? Germ was another obvious pick. He probably wouldn’t be too hard to convince. She was glad his parents got him a PC for longest night. She would also bring Lori in as well. She was too young to die now. At that moment, she saw Selmers and thought that she would bring her in, too. She stopped, breathing heavily.

“Hey, Selmers.” Mae managed to fit in between breaths.

“Hey, Mae. Whatcha up to?”, she said in her normal calm voice.

“Do you have a computer or laptop?”, Mae asked, paying no mind to the question she had just been asked.

“Yeah, why?”

“Can I come in?”, Mae requested.

“Uh, okay.”, Selmers responded, somewhat confused.

They went inside and Selmers brought out her laptop.

“So, what do you want with my laptop? I know you have your own.” Selmers inquired.

“Okay, so, hear me out. Some guy messaged me this morning and told me to play this game and to play it with anyone who I want alive after the end of the world which is supposed to happen in about three hours and I want you with me.” Mae explained.
Selmers, after pondering for a second, said, “Alright, I’ll do it. You’ve been right about this stuff before so I guess I’ll trust you on this one.”

“Thanks, Selmers. Uh, can I get your contact info so all of us can chat later to figure out how this game works?”, Mae asked while copying the files onto Selmers’ laptop.

“Sure.” Selmers wrote down her contact info on a piece of paper and gave it to Mae.

“Thanks, I should get going. I still have more people to convince to join this crazy-sounding game.” Mae said as she made her way out.

“Okay, see you soon.”, Selmers yelled as Mae started to sprint again down the street.

That was one person down, but there were still many more people to convince and she had already used up 15 minutes of her time recruiting Selmers. Mae arrived next at the apartment that she now knew Lori resided in. They had continued to hang out after the incident and eventually, Lori was comfortable enough to invite Mae to her house. Her parents weren’t exactly happy but they never said anything about it. Mae rang the bell to Lori’s apartment, which, luckily for Mae, actually had a button. It was Lori who answered, “W-who is it?”

“Hey, kid. It’s me, Mae.”

“Oh, Okay. What do you need?”, Lori questioned

“I need to talk to you about something. Can I come in?”, asked Mae

“O-okay. My house is pretty m-messy though. I hope you d-don’t mind.”

“It can’t be as bad as my room.”, Mae jokingly replied.

“Ha. Alright. See you when you get up here, then.”

A satisfying click was heard at the end of the conversation and Mae got in the elevator. She pondered what to say, how to explain what was going on when she wasn’t even sure herself. This train of thought was interrupted by a ding as the elevator opened up. Mae went up to Lori’s door and knocked. Once again, she was met with Lori.

“Uh, c-come on in.”, Lori stuttered. She was still getting used to acting normal with people at her house, but it was better than when Mae first visited her.

“This isn’t that messy.”, Mae lied. Lori’s house was quite the sight to behold. She wondered when the last time this house was dusted was. Cobwebs could be seen in all corners of the room. Garbage was strewn about the floor. It was no wonder Lori was nervous when people visited. She never told her any of this, though, out of fear of triggering Lori’s anxiety or something.

The two girls went to Lori’s room, where it was much better kept than the rest of the house. “So, what did you want to talk about?”, Lori asked, seemingly less nervous now that they had entered her room.

Mae then repeated the exact words she said to Selmers because it was all she could think to do at the moment.

“W-wait, what!”, Lori began to hyperventilate. Mae immediately knew that she had screwed up. Selmers was an adult and was much more laid back than Lori. She should have taken it more slowly.
“W-wait, what do y-you mean we’re going t-to d-die?!”, Lori was freaking out. Mae was at a loss for words. She decided to hug Lori to try to calm her down.

“Oh my god, I’m so sorry, I shouldn’t have tried to unload all of that onto you that fast.”

“W-what about my dad? Will he b-be okay?”, Lori pleaded. Mae was afraid of the answer to the next question she would ask, but she had to know.

“Where will your dad be in three hours?”, Mae questioned fearfully.

“M-my dad i-is away for w-work. “, Mae immediately felt a pain in her stomach, “He w-won’t be b-back until this w-weekend.” Mae froze, tears beginning to form as she knew she would be forced to tell Lori of her father’s inevitable death.

“Lori. I’m sorry but your dad isn’t going to…”, Mae’s voice trailed off. She couldn’t bring herself to finish but Lori didn’t need to hear the rest of the sentence to immediately be reduced to wails and sobs as she clutched onto Mae, unable to accept that she would never see her father again.

Mae was letting Lori cry into her for a couple minutes when a thought popped into her head, “What made you believe me so fast? You never questioned me when I told you that the world was ending and that the only way to survive was to play a computer game that some random guy sent me.”

“I-I’m not sure. You j-just sounded so g-genuine and h-honest. Y-you were never o-one to l-lie about what y-you b-believe, no m-matter how c-crazy.” Lori was shaking but she could speak, which was a good sign.

After a couple more minutes of hugging and crying, Lori said solemnly, “How do we start the game?”

“You mean you’re in?”, Mae asked, slightly shocked.

“Y-Yeah. Even if I d-don’t know if I’m r-ready, I have p-people I n-need to be there f-for, like y-you.”

“Wow. That’s a pretty cool reason for accepting.”, Mae responded, “Are you sure you’re ready for this?"

“D-do I really have a choice?”, Lori retorted.

Mae paused for a moment before saying, “Okay.”, as she took out the USB and copied the files into Lori’s computer. She already had Lori’s contact info so she didn’t need to ask for it this time.

“Don’t do anything yet, I’ll add you into a group chat with the rest of us who are going and we can go from there.”, Mae explained.

“Okay. See you later.”, Lori said in an almost monotone voice as Mae made her way out.

Mae felt bad for leaving so suddenly but she was running out of time. Comforting Lori alone took up about 15 minutes and in total the exchange lasted about 30 minutes. This left Mae with 2 hours and 15 minutes before whatever world-ending event that was about to take place. As she passed by the Party Barn, Mae looked longingly inside at their instruments. She knew that she would never play there again. Everything familiar to her was about to be lost forever. Would she experience the same levels of mental deterioration she had at college? She shook her head, trying to clear her head and focus on the more pressing task of saving her friends.
After some more running, Mae had arrived at the Ol’ Pickaxe. The door flew open as Mae stumbled inside. Bea, however, did not seem surprised.

“It’s about time you made it.”, Bea said somewhat sarcastically.

“Did you know I would be here?”, Mae questioned.

“Yeah, John told me you would come here to ask me about SBURB.”

“Why would he tell me to give SBURB to people if he was just going to do it himself?”

“Well, he told me you were taking too long.”

“But I still have, like, 2 hours!”, Mae was confused. She was making good progress, yet apparently, she was taking too long?

“Look, Mae. I don’t know why he did it either and wondering about it will only waste time. I’m in and Gregg and Germ are as well but Angus is still skeptical about it. You should try to convince him to join. I haven’t exactly gotten through to him.”

“Oh, fine. I’ll start a group chat for all of us when I get home. Bye.”, Mae waved at Bea as she left and started running again. As she passed the Video Outpost “Too”, she saw that it was closed for renovations. She went to Gregg an Angus’ apartment building. She decided to forego electrocuting herself again and just went to their door and knocked. Angus answered and he sighed a bit.

“Are you here about SBURB?”, Angus asked, slightly annoyed.

“Of course!”, Mae exclaimed, “Bea told me you’re on the fence about it so I came to try and convince you.”

Angus invited Mae to sit on their couch and Mae happily obliged. “I know it’s probably true. This person seems to know a lot about us and our lives, even things that no one but us should know. Bea was convinced after he started bringing up details about her dead mom and Gregg after he brought up the sheep incident. He knows about my abusive parents and about how Gregg and I ended up in a relationship. I know what he’s saying is true but the cult incident and now this have started to really bring my beliefs into question. I’m not sure if I’m ready to accept that.”

Mae paused, trying to think of a response, but she had nothing to say to that. They sat there for a few minutes of silence until Angus broke it.

“I’ll do it. I need to be there for Gregg, even if it means giving up on my view of the world and forcing myself to find it again.”

Mae simply nodded and exited the apartment, leaving Angus to contemplate their situation and what it would mean for all of them. Mae ran home, now having everyone she could think of when she suddenly remembered Bombshell. After the cult had been destroyed, Mae decided to start hanging out with Bea more. Eventually, Bea took her to one of her college parties where she met Bombshell(Bs), a very tough looking and confident girl. By the end of the party, they had exchanged contact info and they began talking regularly. They even hung out a few times. Mae didn’t want to lose that friendship so after she got home she messaged her.

MB: Heeey, Bombshell!

Bs: Hey. What’s up?
MB: Can you download this for me. It contains a game that supposedly should save us from the impending apocalypse, at least that’s what some guy told me. You can be the eighth person and we’ll have a fun time… Maybe.

Bs: You’re fun, you know that, Brrrrowski?

MB: I’m serious!!!!

Bs: Okay, calm down, I’ll download it.

MB: Thank you. I’m making a group chat for all of us so we can get started. Time is running out.

Mae went and made a group chat. She invited everyone who she had recruited as well as John. John(GT) was the first to join followed by Gregg(GL) soon after.

GT: Are you ready, Mae?

MB: I think so?

GL: This is gonna be so cool!

MB: How can you say that? The world is ending. Your dreams of Bright Harbor will never come true now. Aren’t you even a little sad?

GT: If all goes well, you all should be able to start a new life in a new universe. All of the shit you’ve had to deal with in Possum Springs will be a distant memory.

MB: And what if it doesn’t go well?

GT: It’ll probably be a horrible and painful death followed by living eternally as a ghost.

GL: That sounds like fun! We could go around and haunt people!

GT: That’s not how ghosts actually work, which sucks because you could pull some great pranks with that.

GL: Awwwww 😞

Lori(LM) and Bea(BS) then joined the chat.

BS: Okay, I’m here. Who else are we waiting for?

MB: Let’s see, there’s Angus, Germ, Selmers, Bombshell, and Lori.

LM: I’m here!

MB: So, we’re missing 4 people

GT: Alright, we still have about 1 hour and 10 minutes left. We should start working out the order of entry.

MB: Aw, man, this already sounds too complicated.

GT: If you can’t make it through this then you will not understand anything about this game. It is so damn complicated.

MB: UUUUUUUGH!
BS: Mae, the world is about to end, could you please try to act somewhat mature for 1 hour?


Angus(AD) entered the chat

AD: Hi, guys.

GL: Hey, Cap’n!

GT: Alright, good, you’ll be here for the explanation on how to enter the game.

AD: I’m ready when you are.

GT: Okay. The first thing I should point out is that everyone received 2 files. One contains a server file and a client file. Everyone will act as someone’s server as well as a different person’s client. A server manipulates a client’s house through their computer and builds the house up. We need to decide the cycle of who will become the client of who.

LM: I don’t know if I can handle having control of someone’s whole house! Why does this have to happen? I’m not ready for this.

MB: Lori, calm down. How about you be my server so that if something goes wrong, it’ll be to someone you can trust not to get mad?

LM: I’d like that, thank you, but who’s gonna be my server?

MB: Angus, would you mind being her server? I trust you more than anyone not to lead her in the wrong direction.

AD: That’s fine.

GL: Can I be your server, cap’n?

AD: That’s also fine. I’m not sure how many others would trust you with their house

GL: Ouch, my feelings. How could you say such a thing?

AD: I’m just teasing you, bug.

GL: Well your tease broke my heart. I don’t know if it can ever be fixed.

At that moment, Germ(GW), Selmers(SF), and Bombshell(Bs) all joined

GW: Hi

SF: How’s it going?

Bs: ‘sup?

GT: Good, everyone is here. If the newcomers could read our earlier conversation then we can really get started.

Bs: Hey, Borowski, do ya wanna be my server player?

Bs: Yeah. You’re a tough person, Mae. I want someone like you to be my server player.
Bs: No prob. Hey, Selms, we bears should stick together. Let me be your server player.
SF: Uh, sure. I wouldn’t mind that.
AD: I’m a bear.
Bs: Yeah, but you already have a client and server player. Guess you should have waited, huh, big guy?
AD: I’m fine with my server and client players. I was just wondering.
GT: That just leaves Bea and Germ.
BS: I don’t really trust a guy that just happens to own explosives, no matter how useful they may be, to be my server so Selmers will be my server, I will be Germ’s, and Germ will be Gregg’s.
GW: I’m fine with that.
GT: Alright, so here’s the last chance to make changes to the order before we start. Any complaints need to come now.
GT: Lori-Mae-Bombshell-Selmers-Bea-Germ-Gregg-Angus-Lori
GT: Any questions?
GT: No?
GT: Okay then so everyone start up both applications and connect to your server and client players.

After a few minutes of fidgeting with the programs, everyone had been set.

GT: Okay, we still have 45 minutes before our time is up. We’re making progress, but there is still a lot to be done. Now, if everyone could find the phernalia registry tab on their computer, you should find a variety of items. Find a space in your client player’s home and place the cruxtruder down. Now would be a good time for everyone to choose a strife specibus, which is basically what weapon type you’ll be using.

MB: I’ll take the club specibus. I can always trust my bat to carry me through in a fight.
GL: Oh, cool! They got a dual knives specibus! Gimme!
LM: I have a machete that would fit into the short sword specibus.
SF: I keep a rifle in my house in case of intruders or my ex… jk, just intruders.
Bs: Alright! This will give me a chance to use my badass greatsword!
MB: You have a greatsword just lying around?
Bs: Yeah, I’m kind of a nerd but hey, that nerdiness is paying off.
BS: All I really have in terms of weaponry are some kitchen knives.
GT: That’s fine. You can still probably do some cool things with that, especially with that lighter.

AD: I don’t really have much in terms of weaponry, either.

GT: gimme a sec

GT: Good news. Your class is mage so you can wield magic as soon as you enter the game. Just find something you’d like to channel it through. Any random set of stick-like objects should work.

AD: I guess these cooking spoons will work for now.

GT: Don’t worry. It gets better. My friend, Rose, started with knitting needles and made some really cool wands out of them.

AD: Okay, thanks.

GW: How easy is it to make explosives in this game?

GT: Really easy once you get going.

GW: I’ll use those, then.

BS: This is exactly why I didn’t want to have you as my server player.

GW: Yes, but now you have to fix any damage I do to the house with my explosives.

BS: Goddamnit!

As this conversation drew on, everyone placed down their cruxtruder, a machine with a cylinder on top with a strange circular pattern on it, as well as their alchemiters, which were large circular pads with the same symbol found on the cruxtruder, and totem lathes, which appeared to have a space for you to place something as well as a card slot, as they were all free.

GT: Alright. I think we’re finally ready to enter the game. We’ll start with Lori as she is the youngest here so it would be best if she got the easiest cruxite artifact.

MB: What the hell is a cruxite artifact?

GT: We’ll get to that soon. First, Lori needs to hit the top of her cruxtruder with a heavy object.

LM: If my dad was here, he would freak out at the noise this will make.

BS: Shit! My dad is gonna be pissed if I wake him up with this.

GT: You haven’t told your dad yet?

BS: No.

GT: You should get your dad acquainted with the situation. He needs to be ready to defend himself once you enter the medium (AKA the game world)

BS: My dad isn’t capable of defending himself! He can barely get off the couch!

MB: My parents aren’t exactly capable of fighting, either.

GT: Oh, I didn’t realize your parents were so different from ours. Ours were great fighters, some even more than us, at least before we climbed our echeladders a decent amount (which is like
leveling up), and they still all died except for Jane’s dad.

MB: I thought you said anyone in our houses would have a chance at survival?!

GT: Chance was the keyword in that statement. Look, most of our parents/guardians died going off and trying to fight the final boss or something. If you can clear your house of the initial enemies and then build some sort of defenses, they should have a much better chance of survival.

GL: I just realized something. If the world is ending, should I just leave work and return home? Our apartment probably has better supplies than the Snack Falcon.

GT: No. Everyone needs to have a separate building or else the game won’t work. You still have some time left to go gather supplies, especially since you’re the second to last person to enter, but you must have a different residence than Angus.

LM: Alright I released this glowing ball thing and I got a cylinder from the cruxtruder. I tried taking this card with holes in it that I found in my inventory, which we have now, and I put it into the totem lathe, which carved my cylinder into something. What do I do with it?

GT: Great! That saved me some explaining. Now go to the alchemiter and place the dowel on it. Don’t do anything yet, though. We need to prototype your kernel sprite (the glowing ball).

LM: What?

GT: Alright, everyone listen. When you have a kernel sprite, you can put any object into it and it will take the appearance of said object. The enemies in your world, as well as the final boss, will gain powers based on what you put in before the game. You absolutely MUST prototype pre-medium or your session will be void. You can throw the remains of dead relatives or pets in if you wish. You would get to see them again once we enter the Medium and it would probably be nice to have someone you know guiding you. You can prototype a kernel sprite twice but the second prototyping should be saved for later so you don’t give the enemies more power than necessary. This second prototyping could also act as a backup in case any of your parents die.

LM: What should I put in?

GT: Anything worthless and non-threatening, like a tissue, although, if you think your mom may not survive the initial entry into the medium, you could always prototype her first. I doubt the enemies would gain a significant boost from that and you could potentially save your mother from a painful death, but it’s your choice.

LM: I can prototype my mom into the kernel sprite! brb.

GL: Alright I gathered up some cool stuff to alchemize with so my weapons aren’t complete trash so I should be good.

GT: If Lori’s gone, then I guess Mae could start her process. It’s only the order that we summon our kernel sprite that decides the order of artifacts.

MB: Sounds good.

Everyone had finished preparing their cruxite dowel and people were deciding what to prototype their kernel sprite with. Mae had asked her parents if they still had grandpa’s ashes and they said yes. They didn’t get the chance to ask why she wanted his ashes or about the glowing ball following Mae around before Mae ran upstairs. She found the ashes in their usual place in the crawlspace. Luckily, Mae’s dad hadn’t accidentally thrown them out along with the boxes. Mae
took them and put them in the kernel sprite. She could see the face of her grandpa in the ball but it
wouldn’t fully develop until she had entered the medium.

Bea had decided to use her mother’s corpse like Lori. She was close enough to the cemetery. She
could make it. She would get to see her mother again. They could catch up on all the time they had
missed together. She drove past the speed limit unconsciously. She barely snapped out of her train
of thought before she hit the gate leading into the cemetery and was able to stop just in time. She
took a shovel out of her car and rushed to the grave as fast as her legs could take her. She reached
the tombstone of her mother and dug furiously. Within a few minutes, she was face to face with the
coffin. Without a second thought, she threw open the casket and dragged out the corpse of her
deceased mother. She had just made it back to the car and was about to drive off when she noticed
the grave keeper running after her. She drove away, knowing that the cops wouldn’t make it to her
house before she had entered the game.

Angus had considered his options in terms of prototyping. He didn’t really have any family or pets
to revive. He decided on a tissue like John had recommended. It would cause the least trouble for
him and his team. Selmers and Bombshell did the same, not having anyone they wanted to bring,
either.

Germ had thrown his copy of Werewolf: Shred the Gnar 3 into his kernel sprite, much to
everyone’s dismay. Germ didn’t really care, though. He wanted his favorite skateboarding
werewolf as his all-knowing guide to the world of SBURB. Lori found the ashes of her dead mom
and threw them in. She was happy to have at least one parent with her for her session.

Gregg was the last one to prototype his kernel sprite. It went horribly wrong. He was about to
throw a cup at it so his team wouldn’t be too burdened by his prototyping, but as he was about to
do the deed, someone walked into the Snack Falcon.

“Hello, Gregg.”, said the figure in a voice that made Gregg’s heart skip a beat. It wasn’t naturally
frightening or anything. What scared him was who he knew the voice belonged to. Turning
around, he was met with a cloaked and masked figure. He recognized immediately that it was Eide
from the caves. He drew his knives from his totally awesome dual knives specibus (like, seriously,
dual knives are so cool).

“I wouldn’t recommend trying to stab me.”, advised Eide, “I am one with the black goat now. He
saved me from the cave in and gave me my arm back. We want revenge on those who dared to
oppose us. That plan was made incredibly easy once we realized you were attempting to start
SBURB. We couldn’t allow you to leave this universe, at least not without taking us with you. I’ll
force you to take me with you if I have to.”

“You’re not coming with us. You killed Casey. I’ll never forgive you for that. I don’t care what
powers you have. You’ll have to kill me before I’ll let you join our session.”, Gregg’s voice was
filled with a calm but powerful rage that would make most people afraid to ever speak with him
again. Eide was not most people.

“Or, I could do this.”, he said, snapping his fingers and appearing instantly behind Gregg, and
before Gregg could react, he touched the kernel sprite.

GT: FUCK! NO!
MB: What happened?
GT: Eide was just at the Snack Falcon!
AD: Is Gregg okay?!

GT: He’s fine but Eide fucking prototyped himself into Gregg’s kernel sprite. He can teleport and god knows what else thanks to the black goat.

MB: Does that mean all of the enemies in our session will have his powers?

GT: Yes. All of the enemies now have the power of an eldritch god. Fucking great! Look, the same thing happened to our session when Jade’s god dog prototyped itself into her kernel sprite. The difference here is that Eide isn’t going to help you. He’ll probably use his powers to screw with you, unlike Bec who was still loyal to Jade.

BS: Well, how the hell do we stop it?

GT: The enemies can never be changed back, but you could possibly get rid of eidesprite by prototyping it with someone with conflicting personalities. The kernel sprite would be unstable and probably explode itself.

BS: But we don’t know what his personality is. All we know is that he’s evil.

GT: Then, the best you can do is hope he doesn’t immediately kill you.

BS: Great! Sounds fun!

AD: We should just focus on getting into the game and we can move on from there. The end of the world is still coming and we only have, like, 15 minutes left.

LM: I’m back. My mom is prototyped and omg a lot happened while I was gone.

GT: Okay, we can start the final step now. If you could all alchemize your artifacts now, we can get you all into the medium.

Everyone made their artifacts and were very confused with what they received.

GL: What am I supposed to do with this?

MB: Yeah. I’m confused.

GT: I can’t tell you what to do from here. All I can tell you is that each object has a task associated with it. Said task increases in difficulty as you move down the chain. Lori was given the easiest one and Angus has the hardest one.

Everyone began to think about what their task would be. Lori received a necklace. She thought to put it on and was sent to the medium. Mae had a ball and tee. She hit the ball with her bat and she, too, made it in. Bombshell was given a bottle and shot glass. She poured the bottle into the shot glass and drank it. It had no taste and in fact, she couldn’t feel the liquid at all, but she made it in. Selmers was given a microphone. After thinking of possibilities, she read one of her poems into the mic. That was it. She was in. Bea was given a pack of cigarettes and she began smoking one. All she felt was the strange material of the cigarette on her lips but it continued to burn. Once it had run out, she was teleported to the medium. Germ was given a safe. Before long, he had rigged the safe with explosives and detonated. Despite the magical nature of the safe, it opened and he found himself in the medium. Gregg got two cups. He was at a loss. He decided to put them on his ears while he thought about it. After thinking for a bit, he looked up to see that he had made it to the medium.
That left Angus. There were only 5 minutes left and he was given a phone. He placed the phone to his ear and heard, “Are you ready?” It was such a simple question but Angus couldn’t find an answer. He thought about everything this game meant for him. It was the end of his entire world. Everything he thought he knew was being opposed. He was scared. He wasn’t ready. He sat there, plagued by thoughts of this game when he received a message on his laptop. It was from Gregg. It read, “What’s taking so long? Please hurry. The meteor is almost there. I need you here. I can’t do this without you.” It was those last two sentences that made Angus realize why he had to be ready. He had someone to be there for. Finally, he said, “Yes.”, into the phone and the apartment disappeared just as the meteor was touching it.

Everyone was in the medium, now. Their SBURB session could finally begin. Their journey would be a long one, filled with trials and tribulations that they could never have imagined. For the moment, though, they could still be glad that everyone made it in alive. They were prepared to face the worst as long as they had each other.
Chapter 2

Once everyone was in, a short period of calm was followed by the storm. Everyone saw or heard things breaking into their houses. Those who had family or friends with them rushed to their aid while the rest stood their ground or hid. Mae ran downstairs to find her father, holding a kitchen knife and keeping her mother behind him. They were surrounded by small black creatures with goat antlers, cat ears, and a crocodile snout. They growled like rabid dogs. One lunged at Mae’s father, Stan. He swung the knife, making direct contact. The knife, however, simply bounced off harmlessly. Mae was at their side in an instant and she began swinging her bat wildly. She cried out in anger, “Get AWAY from them!” She managed to kill a few and to her surprise, the rest actually started to back off. She stood her ground, trying to put on a brave face in the wake of these creatures that could easily kill her and her family in seconds. She yelled out again, “Leave!”, as she swung again the rest of the imps scampered out of the house. She calmed down a bit and hoped her friends were having as much luck as she was.

Gregg was in the worst position. He only had the main room and the supply room to work with and large windows covered the front of the Snack Falcon. Once the imps came, he immediately began to be overwhelmed. There were too many entrances. He saw Eidesprite try to leave and he threw a cup at him. It hit perfectly and it was prototyped. He heard Eidesprite scream various profanities as he left. At least he had prevented a stronger second prototyping. People were probably dying due to his failure to stop Eide. As the fight drew on, Gregg was being worn down. There were too many of them. He was about to give up when he saw Germ flying in on a jetpack. Germ proceeded to toss a flashbang grenade into the small convenience store. Gregg was blinded for a few seconds but when he regained his vision the imps were gone. “Thanks, Ge-“, he started before realizing that he had already left. Gregg sat against a wall, contemplating what just happened. He cried, feeling trapped and lonely. He had screwed up their session. He hoped everyone was okay. He hoped that his mistake hadn’t cost any of them their lives.

Germ flew away from Gregg’s home and up towards the third gate. His kernel sprite had helped arm him with advanced explosives and a jetpack through some alchemy before telling him how to reach everyone through the gates above their houses as well as telling him who needed his help the most. As he entered the gate, he found himself on Lori’s planet, The Land of blood and friendship. Blood rivers and ponds covered the planet. Despite this, the residents of the planet, some strange lizard creatures, seemed to be very kind and friendly. Every planet housed these creatures, but they acted differently on each planet.

Eventually, Germ saw Lori’s house. There was a mass of black surrounding the building. He flew in through an open window and saw Lori’s sprite fighting the imps. He knew the sprite couldn’t die so he left it to continue fighting. He broke down the door to Lori’s room and this caused the terrified mouse to practically jump. Without warning, he carried her outside and placed her away from the imps. He then took out a large bomb and lit the fuse, throwing it into the house. A large boom reverberated across the planet as all of the imps either died or were thrown off the island. The house was still standing but the inside was badly damaged. Germ nodded at Lori before making his way to the fourth gate above Lori’s house. “Only two more to go.”, he muttered to himself as he approached the gate leading to Selmers’ house.

When he arrived in the Land of Clockwork and Tapestries, he noticed that the locals were all creating tapestries of the eight of them who entered the session. The planet was filled with a constant tick as gears turned slowly in the distance. After about 30 seconds he saw Selmers and Mr. Chazokov on the roof of their apartment. Selmers was firing her rifle from the roof while Chazokov held his telescope and pushed down any imps who got close to the top. Germ threw a
Flashbang into the house and all of the imps flooded out. He then threw a gas grenade into the group and forced them to flee or suffocate. Selmers saw him and waved. Germ waved back as he went to the second gate, this one leading to Bea’s planet, the Land of Jails and Industry.

Bea’s planet was covered in factories and prisons. Everyone seemed miserable, but they continued to work or risk being trapped in a cell. Germ thought about why this would be Bea’s planet when he saw Bea’s apartment. There were dead people strewn about, those who didn’t survive the initial attack. He found a window leading into Bea’s apartment and threw his last flash bang inside and throwing the last gas grenade to the ground floor. Imps unknowingly were running to their own deaths. Germ left for Bea’s second gate before she recovered. His job was done. The rest could handle themselves.

Bea had seen Germ outside and was surprised by the flashbang he threw into her apartment. After recovering from the blindness it had caused, she looked around to find that the imps were gone. Her eyes then froze after passing over a body on the ground surrounded by blood. It was her dad. She rushed over to him and knelt beside him. “No, no, you can’t die now! We only just started! Wake up, please! I know we’ve had some rough times between us but I need you!” Bea was panicking as she shook her father in hopes he would wake up. Then, a thought popped into her head. She began to drag the body towards her kernel sprite, leaving a trail of blood along the carpet. She threw him in and it became a fusion of both of her parents.

“It’s good to finally see you again.”, said the sprite in a deeply loving voice. Bea could only stare at it and cry. Both of her parents were alive and well. That sparked a happiness within Bea that she hadn’t felt since her mom died.

“I love you.”, Bea finally said.

Bombshell was probably the best off out of everyone, killing imps left and right with general ease. She was surprisingly good with a greatsword despite never actually using one before. After a solid 10 minutes of fighting, the imps had begun to fall back.

“Come on, where are the eldritch god powers we were promised?”, She asked cockily. All of the imps had left and she was left to reap the spoils. Strange objects covered the floor that disappeared when touched. She had also climbed her echeladder a considerable amount and received what the game referred to as boondollars. She wasn’t sure what either of these did but she was happy to collect them. She decided to see what was outside. Her house was floating above the ground and below, she saw mountains as well as many frogs hopping around. She was a bit confused but she thought it would be best to leave it alone and attempt to contact the group.

Angus had immediately acquainted himself with his magic. It looked very cool. He could fire green energy beams out of his wooden spoons and it was awesome. His admiration for his new powers was put on hold when he heard screams coming from downstairs. He rushed to the bottom floor to find bodies all over the ground, surrounded by imps. He began firing magic at the imps, which was pretty effective at killing large groups of them. After he had cleared the room, more screams came from upstairs. He ran up to find broken windows accompanied by more bodies and imps. He killed these ones just as easily as the first ones. After clearing the whole building, Angus began checking pulses. He found none. Everyone in the apartment building had died except for him. He was alone. He noticed his sprite next to him and began wondering if he should prototype one of the bodies. Would any of them want to come back to a world like this? He decided to hold off on prototyping until he could find something worth prototyping. He decided to go back to his computer and tell everyone he was ok.

Mae was still frozen in the stance she had taken to defend her parents from the imps. Eventually, she turned around and asked, “Are you two okay?”
Stan replied, “We’re fine, kitten. What about you? You look terrible.”

Mae hadn’t realized until that moment just how exhausted she was from today’s events. She suddenly felt like she couldn’t support her own body anymore. Stumbling to the couch, Mae sat down and let out a sigh. “I’m fine, just tired.”

“What’s going on? What were those things that attacked us? Where even are we?” Candy, Mae’s mom, was practically interrogating her daughter for answers. Mae explained everything she knew about SBURB and their session, including the cult, the kernel sprite, etc.

“So, Possum Springs is gone?”, questioned Stan.

“Yeah.”

With that, Candy cupped her hands to her face and said, “Oh, god, Molly!” Sobs could be heard from her as Mae had just realized that she forgot her aunt in all of the chaos. Stan had an empty expression almost void of emotion as he, too, was processing what happened to Molly.

“There wasn’t enough time. Our group only barely made it to the medium in time. If I had tried to convince you of this earlier, we wouldn’t have survived.” Mae was lying to herself. She was just being dumb and irresponsible as usual. That’s why her aunt was dead. She couldn’t let her parents know that, though. She had already taken so much from them. As they were grieving together, a voice spoke.

“Son? Is that you?” Stan looked up and was met with the visage of his father in Mae’s kernel sprite.

“Dad!”, Stan cried as he went to hug him. The sprite moved out of the way.

“Whoa! You can’t touch me. You’d prototype yourself into me if you did.”

“Oh, right.”, Stan said sullenly.

“We can talk later. I need to get Mae acquainted with the different systems in SBURB as well as her goal.”

Mae stood and followed her grandpa up to her room. As they walked up the stairs, Mae asked, “Should I do your second prototyping before we get started?”

“What did you have in mind?”

“How about my Witchdagger poster. You could get cool witch powers.”, Mae responded.

“Sounds good.”, the sprite said as they entered Mae’s room. Mae took her poster but before she put it in, her grandfather remembered something.

“Wait! We should make a copy of the poster for later. We could probably alchemize some cool stuff with it.”

“How do I do that? I still don’t know what alchemy even is in this game.”

“First, captchalogue the poster into your sylladex.” Mae proceeded to stare at her grandpa like he was insane. He reworded the statement, “Put the poster in your inventory.” Mae fiddled with the poster for a bit until she had it in her sylladex.

“Okay, what now?”
“Now, take the card with the poster over to the… Oh. You don’t have a punch designix. Well, I guess we’ll have to wait on making a copy of the poster for now. But we can prepare the code to make a copy. Go to your computer and open up a notes page. Then, put the code on the back of the card into the computer so we can make it later. After that, you can throw the poster into me.” Mae did as she was told and stored the code before prototyping her sprite with the poster. Her grandpa now had a witchdagger costume on.

“That costume looks SO cool on you.”, Mae complimented.

“Why, thank you.”, he replied in a sarcastic tone.

“It’s so good to finally see you again. Why don’t you go talk to mom and dad? They probably want to catch up and stuff and I should reconnect with my friends to let them know I’m okay.”

“Okay. Just tell me when you’re ready to start your journey.”, her grandpa said as he exited Mae’s room. Mae went to her laptop and typed in the chat.

MB: Is anyone there? Just wanted to let everyone know I’m okay. I hope everyone’s alive.

AD: I’m fine. No one else in the apartment made it, though.


BS: I am also okay. Turns out, I was always meant to be a badass swordsman.

MB: That’s cool. How many did you kill?

BS: A few dozen at least.

SF: I’m alive and so is Chazokov.

MB: That’s great!

SF: Germ actually came to help us. We probably would have died if he hadn’t been for his smart use of explosives. We’re kinda stuck on the roof until his gas bomb clears out, though.

LM: You got lucky. Germ threw an actual bomb into my house and now it’s a disaster inside.

MB: Lori! You’re okay?

LM: Yeah.

MB: How did Germ manage to reach you guys.

SF: It seems like the gates above our houses lead to each other or something. He was flying around on a jetpack to get to them.

GT: Don’t try to use any sort of flying device to skip your gates unless you absolutely NEED to get to someone else’s planet, especially the seventh one.

MB: Why? It seems like we could bypass a large portion of the game this way.

GT: An alternate version of me tried to skip to the seventh gate and was killed instantly by his denizen, which is like the final boss of your world because he was under leveled and his gear was
still garbage.

MB: Okay. Guess we should avoid that, then.

GT: Yeah, you should.

GL: Is everyone okay?

MB: Yeah, Gregg. It seems like everyone’s making it through just fine. We’re only waiting for Bea and Germ.

GL: Oh, god! Angus, everyone in the apartment died?!

AD: Yeah. I couldn’t get to any of them before the imps killed them.

GL: This is all my fault. I let Eide into my kernel sprite. I’m the reason all of those people are dead.

MB: That’s not true! It’s Eide’s fault for being a little bitch and prototyping himself instead of actually fighting us.

AD: Mae’s right. You’re not responsible for this. Those people probably wouldn’t have survived this game, regardless. You shouldn’t feel guilty about it.

GL: But I didn’t even try to stop him. I could have attacked him while he was talking or I could have prototyped faster. Something, at least, but no, I just stood there because I was too scared to do anything. I let all of those people down. I always let everyone down.

AD: Bug, It’s okay. You can’t let this get to you. People were going to die in this game. That was inevitable. You need to stop beating yourself down and telling yourself you could have done more. It’s too late to fix it now. Let’s focus on getting the rest of us out alive.

GL: I guess.

GW: Hi, guys.

MB: Alright! Germ’s back!

SF: Thanks for saving me earlier. I owe you one.

GL: Same, here.

GW: It was nothing.

MB: How’s your family?

GW: I helped set up some defenses and then left to help all of you. Their fine for now.

MB: That’s good to hear.

BS: I’m back. What did I miss?

MB: Go read the chat log if you want to know what happened while you were gone.

BS: Okay, so everyone’s back now. What do we do from here?

GT: It would be best for everyone who hasn’t already prototyped their kernel sprite a second time
to do so. Go all out this time. Make them powerful. The imps won't gain anything else from your prototyping now that you’re in the game.

Angus, after having thought about it for a while, decided to throw in a demontower shirt he had, giving his kernel sprite the face of Palecat along with his sword. Lori gave it a copy of Friday the 13th, a classic. Her mother was equipped with a machete and a hockey mask, which she promptly took off, revealing a face with an eviler look to it. She was ready to brutally murder some imps and whatever else the game threw at them. Selmers asked Mr. Chazokov if he would like to be prototyped and he reluctantly agreed, touching the kernel sprite. Bombshell had plenty of nerdy stuff she could prototype. She acted really badass and cool in social situations but she was really a nerd at heart. She loved anime and video games. She eventually decided on her copy of sword people online. It was a good game despite the dumb name. The sprite manifested into a typical anime swordsman. It almost made Bombshell want to start fangirling but she contained her excitement so she could focus on the task at hand. Germ was last. He took the time to alchemize the best bomb he could with his available supplies. He threw it in and his werewolf sprite could now create explosions at will.

GT: Good. Now, everyone should place a punch designix in their client players’ houses. It should be in the phernalia registry now that you entered the game.

BS: I already placed that as soon as I entered the game. I guess it’s good that I did. It allowed Germ to alchemize the jetpack and explosives he used to single-handedly save our session. I hope you don’t mind that I destroyed some tables and chairs to get the grist to build it.

GW: It’s fine. I don’t mind.

Everyone went and placed down a punch designix in their clients’ homes.

GT: You should be able to do basic alchemy now. Your sprites should all be able to explain it to you. Now, your goal is to build your clients’ houses up to their 7 gates. Once a player travels through all 7 gates, they will be faced with their denizen. You can either kill them or maybe talk to them and complete some task. Once you defeat a denizen, you will be able to move on to the final stages of the game and reach god tier if you so choose.

AD: What do you mean when you say, “god tier”?

GT: Every one of you has a class and aspect. These two things will decide what powers you have. Your class decides how you use your aspect. For example, Gregg is a rouge of breath, which would be one who steals the aspect of breath and redistributes it to others and Bea is a sylph of blood who heals blood or heals through blood. Aspect names shouldn’t be taken literally. Breath can mean wind but it can also mean freedom and direction. Blood could be literal blood but it could also mean family and bonds between friends.

MB: Oh, what am I?!

GT: You are a thief of rage or one who steals rage to benefit themselves.

MB: That just makes me sound like an asshole! Why would I want to steal rage and keep it for myself?

BS: To be fair, you can be an asshole sometimes.

MB: That’s not funny!

BS: Really? I find it pretty funny.
GT: Your power could have a wealth of useful applications in a fight. Stealing an enemies’ conviction combined with Gregg’s ability to steal someone’s sense of choice could be a deadly force on the battlefield and to add onto that, Lori is the page of heart. It’ll be incredibly difficult for her to god tier as she is currently the weakest member of the party, which is true of most pages, but if she can bring herself to die on her quest bed, she will most likely be the most powerful member of the party. Her power to manipulate the enemies sense of self combined with what I mentioned earlier could reduce most enemies to an empty shell, unable to bring themselves to fight you.

MB: That sounds awesome but this is still really complicated. Also, we have to die to become god tier? What’s a quest bed?

LM: I don’t want to die! That’s horrible!

GT: Don’t worry about it for now. Once you reach the top of your echeladder, I’ll explain in more detail how to god tier.

SF: While we’re on the subject, could you tell the rest of us our class and aspect?

GT: Sure. Angus is a Mage of Mind Selmers is a maid of time, Bombshell is a witch of space, and Germ is a bard of void. Selmers and Bombshell will be extremely important to this session as they are the time and space players. I’ll let my friends Dave(TG) and Jade explain your roles and why they’re so important. Also, be careful about Germ. Being a bard, he has the potential to either be your most powerful asset or a detriment to the entire session. My group had to deal with the latter in our session and it was a nightmare.

TG: You called?

GT: Oh! Hi, Dave.

TG: Hey, John. Is that you? Didn’t you change your name to ectobiologist?

GT: Yeah, but I changed it back to ghostytrickster because I didn’t have to worry about getting trolled anymore and I liked that name better.

MB: Wow. All of us are just unoriginal. Most of us used our real names as usernames except for Bombshell, who just used her nickname instead. I guess that explains why your initials don’t match up with your name.

Bs: I never liked my real name so I just took what you gave me and went with it.

MB: What is your real name?

Bs: I’d rather let my name be a mystery, if you don’t mind.

MB: I guess.

GT: This talk of usernames is great and all but I think we should get to work getting Selmers acquainted with how she should be using her powers and then her and Bombshell can get familiar with frog breeding.

SF: Lay it on me.

TG: Alright Selms. I will be your guide to the world of being a time player. Your job is to exploit the ever-living fuck out of your time powers. You better understand time loops because I sure as hell aren’t explaining them. You are going to use time loops to dupe all sorts of cool shit. Grist,
boondollars, etc. Once you’ve reached everyone’s max grist, keep going for the boondollars. If you do that for long enough, you should be far enough up your echeladder to alchemize some cool shit and steamroll the fuck out of your gates. Once your denizen is dead, you should be ready to reach god tier. Be happy you have a gun ‘cause that’ll make your death quick and painless. After that, go help your session’s space player breed some frogs. Trust me, it’s as boring as it sounds. Other than that, I’ll let Jade explain the rest. As long as you didn’t accidentally prototype an all-powerful god or some shit into your kernel sprite, you should be fine.

GT: Uh, Dave. That’s exactly what happened.

TG: Oh… shit, you’re all probably screwed. It was nice knowing you. I’ve heard living forever as a ghost isn’t too bad. Have fun.

GT: Shut up, Dave! …Ok, he’s gone. I called Jade over. She’ll help Bombshell and Selmers with frog breeding. Everyone else should get to work on clearing their gates and climbing their echeladders. Good luck!

Everyone except for Selmers and Bombshell left to start building up to their gates. Bea would have to wait as Selmers was her server player. She figured she would build up Germ’s house to his first gate and do some early-game grinding while she waited.

TG: I forgot to give you this. It’ll let you distribute the grist you get from your exploits evenly among your players. Wouldn’t want to leave them out of the fun. Sadly, you can’t give boondollars to other people. Also, I heard you do poetry? You should try your hand at some raps. We could exchange some sick slam poetry.

SF: Slam poetry?

GT: Don’t question it.

There was a download link and Selmers downloaded it. It contained an application that began divvying out her available grist to the rest of the group.

Lori’s house was the first to reach the first gate, thanks to Angus’ brutal efficiency. Lori fought her way up to the first gate, displaying a lack of skill in fighting rivaling everyone else. She was afraid. She was scared of dying. She didn’t want to let everyone down. Her mother did most of the fighting. Once they reached the first gate, Lori saw a giant ogre. Her eyes widened as she ducked to hide from it. Her mother said, “Lori, you need to be able to face big threats like this. I can’t follow you through that first gate. You’re going to be on your own. I won’t help you with this fight unless you’re about to die. Now, go!”

Lori sat there, shaking, before she slowly stood, tightened her grip and ran at the ogre, screaming. Before the fight, she had alchemized a chainsaw with her machete to create the chainchete. It was a stupid name, but it added a chain to the blade of her weapon, increasing its effectiveness. The weapon roared as she lunged at the ogre, cutting deep into its leg. The ogre let out a roar before slamming his fist down, knocking Lori back. She fell and tried to stand back up when the ogre picked her up and threw her across the ground. Lori struggled to get back up. She slowly backed away, not realizing how close she was to the edge until she began falling. She quickly landed on something. She looked down to see a floating platform connected to her mother. She floated back up to the house and was told to, “Try again!”, by her mother.

Lori wanted to reject her mother’s demand but she knew that she had to be able to fight. She steeled herself and ran at the ogre again. The ogre slammed once more but Lori was ready. She dodged and swung at the previously injured leg, fully severing it this time. The ogre toppled over, creating
a loud thud as it landed. Lori screamed, sending the chainchete through the creature’s neck, causing it to explode into a large amount of grist. She breathed heavily, covered in blood, and deeply joyed to have taken down the ogre almost completely by herself. Soon after, she reached out to her first gate, ready to begin her journey and make it out of this hell known as SBURB.

Mae was having trouble building up Bombshells’ house. Jade was still explaining frog breeding to her and Selmers so she wasn’t getting grist for Mae to build up her house with. Mae decided to take a break and go kill some imps. She hadn’t been outside yet. Lori was probably having trouble building her house up as well. Mae grabbed her bat, the Witchbane, which she had made by combining her bat with her Witchdagger poster. The bat was black and covered in runic symbols with a small white ring separating the handle and bat. She sent the code for the poster to Gregg, thinking it would be awesome if he had a pair of Witchdaggers. She laughed at her not-so-clever pun as she walked downstairs.

After saying goodbye to her parents, Mae stepped outside. What greeted her was a pitch-black sky filled with shapes as well as hundreds of cave openings below her. She began having flashbacks. Memories of college and the cult assaulted her. Mae stumbled backward, her legs collapsing under the weight of her raging emotions. “We exist. We’re not just shapes. We exist! WE’RE NOT JUST SHAPES!” Mae’s voice grew louder as she repeated these words to herself. She was trapped in this cycle until her mother grabbed her.

“Mae! Calm down! Snap out of it!”, Candy pleaded as she shook her terrified daughter. Mae froze, forcing herself back into reality. She stared at her mother briefly before hugging her and sobbing. Holding her daughter close, Candy asked, “Honey, what is going on with you? Does this have to do with the cult or college? You need to tell us what’s happening so we can help you.”

“Oh, kitten, you should have told us. We could have helped you.”, Stan started. “I’m sorry about that argument we had about college. If I had known, I would’ve been fine with it. We could’ve found a better doctor. I know Dr. Hank wasn’t the best.”, Mae’s mother apologized. “Thank you. I’m sorry I never told you.”, Mae replied. Mae’s grandpa was happy to see these issues finally being worked out, but Mae still had a job to do.

“Mae, it’s great that you’re finally opening up to your parents but you still need to beat this game. Do you think you’re ready to face what’s out there?”

After a few seconds, Mae replied, “Yeah, grandpa, I think so.”

Mae once again said her goodbyes as she left for the door. She took a deep breath before stepping outside. Tuning out the shapes and caves, Mae looked up to see that Lori had made a considerable amount of progress with what little grist she had. Mae proceeded to travel up, killing many imps along the way. Progress was still being made on her house as she went. Mae reached her gate and guarding it was an ogre, just like Lori’s. Mae gripped her bat and ran, jumping once she was close to the lumbering giant and bringing her weapon soaring into its skull full force. A satisfying crack was heard as the ogre exploded into grist.

Gregg, Angus, and Germ also made quick work of their ogres. Gregg managed to get up onto his ogre and thrust his knife into its throat, killing it instantly with his new Witchdaggers, which sported black handles with crimson blades attached. Angus had asked for the poster so he could
alchemize with it as well. Using the poster and his cooking spoons, he created a set of wands known as the Witching Hour, both black and engraved with runic symbols which glowed when used. The name implied they were a single unit and their power was amplified if used at the same time. Angus took note of this as he blasted his ogre away with a single, synchronized beam. Germ had combined multiple things together until he crafted a grenade which sent out several small homing mini-explosives when detonated. These made quick work of large, single targets, such as the ogre. All three were ready to enter their first gates.

Only Bea, Selmers, and Bombshell had yet to make it to their first gate. Jade(GG) was finishing up her explanation on how to breed the genesis frog, the creature that would house the new universe for everyone to live in once the game had ended.

Bs: This is kinda overwhelming.

GG: It will be at first. Just refer to this conversation whenever you need advice since I think I’ve covered everything. If I missed something just tell John and I’ll answer any questions. I wish you the best of luck.

GT: Thanks, Jade. That should be all.

GG: Ok. Bye, guys.

SF: I guess I should get to building Bea’s house up, now. Then, I’ll start up some time loops. That’ll let Bombshell focus on the frogs for now because I won’t be entering my first gate for a while.

Bs: Got it. Just message me when you’d like to enter your first gate. See ya later.

SF: Bye.

Selmers immediately began work on Bea’s house. Within a few minutes, the house was tall enough to reach the first gate. Bea would be starting considerably later than everyone else, but she needed the information about frog breeding from Jade. It was a necessary sacrifice. After she had finished, Selmers saw many copies of herself bringing her grist and boondollars. This would help them stock up on early game grist. Selmers knew she would be doing this again each time a new type of grist was found but she didn’t mind. After building up billions of boondollars and maxing out everyone’s grist, which didn’t take very long, she prepared to go back and complete the time loop by going back to give herself the grist. She did so and returned back to the main timeline, keeping all of the grist and boondollars she had piled up from her alternate selves. To anyone else, this would seem complicated but Selmers just understood it. She didn’t know why, but the concept of time and how it works were second nature to her.

She went and told Bombshell she was ready to start. She expected it to take longer, but she guessed that was just how manipulating time worked. Bombshell was surprised to hear she had finished so quickly, but she didn’t mind. Selmers began to ascend her apartment, one-shotting every enemy, despite not alchemizing a new weapon because she was so far up her echeladder thanks to the time shenanigans that it didn’t matter. Effortlessly killing her ogre with one shot to the head, Selmers entered her first gate.

Bombshell’s house was already tall enough to reach the first gate. Using a cool laser sword toy she had, she was able to alchemize an actual laser sword. It let off a slight buzz as she turned it on. It felt weightless save for the handle. After reaching the gate and cutting the ogre clean in half, Bombshell entered her first Gate.
The last to enter her gate was Bea. After seeing her house growing in size, she started the trip up. While she waited, she leveled up a bit and alchemized a lighter that extended into a knife that could be set on fire. The weapon was named Hell’s Razor, a fitting name for a fiery dagger, she thought. It took her a few blows to kill her ogre but it was easy enough. She took a deep breath and entered her gate. Everyone had now entered their first gate. This would be their first true tests in the world of SBURB. Now that the game has finally begun, the mercy that has been shown thus far will no longer exist. Eight entered, how many will leave?
A group of imps surrounded Mae as soon as she entered. Bat at the ready, Mae swung at one of the imps but these imps weren’t like the ones at her house. The imp teleported and struck Mae. Blood began to seep from the wound. Mae cursed under her breath and swung again, this time managing to make contact. The imp died but there were still four more to deal with. The four remaining imps coordinated an attack all at once, creating multiple gash marks and ripping up Mae's clothes. Mae was angered by this and began swinging wildly. Black collides with black as red spilled out, covering Mae. Red shapes, all over the ground. Mae slowly regained her sanity and realized what just happened.

No. This can’t be happening. I thought I was over this.

Memories of the softball incident surfaced as Mae attempted to calm herself. A few moments later, Mae journeyed forward, searching for the end gate which would take her back and mark her completion of the first gate’s challenge.

Mae fought some more imps as she went. Having learned from her first encounter with the new and improved imps, fighting them became less difficult. Eventually, Mae found herself coming up to a dire scene. A group of lizard people was being harassed by two ogres. Mae knew these ogres could probably do the same things the imps could do and she was still weakened from her first encounter with them but these people would die if she didn’t do something.

A war cry was heard as Mae sprinted at the ogre. She then jumped, jumped, and jumped again to give herself a boost on the last jump. She didn’t know why it worked. It was probably just physics or something. The extra height gained from her last jump allowed Mae to get on top of one of the ogres with ease. She began wailing on the ogres’ head with her bat. After a few seconds, a roar sounded from behind Mae as the other ogre prepared a punch. Mae jumped off and the ogre she was on teleported away from the attack.

The ogres began a barrage of teleports and punches, forcing Mae to be on the defensive. It was only a matter of time before a swing landed, sending Mae flying. The other ogre caught her mid-air and threw her to the ground. Mae stood, using her bat for support. Through the chaos, Mae remembered the first imps she encountered. Something had broken and that allowed her to effortlessly kill all four imps. She tried to recreate that same scenario here but it wasn’t working. One of the ogres picked her up and began to squeeze. Mae was screaming. It hurt so much. She could feel her bones beginning to break when suddenly, primal fear and rage gripped her once more. Everything faded into shapes and Mae pushed back against the grip of the large beast before her. Managing to free herself, Mae stared down the ogre with eyes ablaze with fury. The two monsters began to back away, their anger replaced with fear. Mae ran and jumped in the perfect position to send Witchbane flying through both of the ogres’ heads, knocking both clean off. Blood rained down as the ogres exploded into large amounts of grist.

Mae had won but her rage still consumed her. All she saw was shapes, shapes that mocked her as she walked towards the lizard people, murderous intent in her eyes

_—_p!

She gripped the bat harder, ready to kill without remorse.

St_—_p! Pl__s_—_!
As her bat was raised, a voice broke through.

Stop! They don’t deserve to die!

Mae found herself standing over two terrified little creatures, huddled together, cowering in fear. She stepped back, dropping her bat and clutching her head, her fear and guilt pulling her down like chains. The lizard folk took this chance to run away. While processing what she almost did, a gate opened in front of Mae. She had taken her first steps to being able to control her emotions. Mae reluctantly stepped through, returning to her house, her family, her friends, the only things left in this world that were familiar to her.

Gregg made his way through the land of fans and darkness. Fans could be heard all around Gregg as he continued forward. He could hardly see. Darkness surrounded him. He had a flashlight which helped slightly but he had to put it away when he fought because he needed two hands to hold two daggers. Gregg wished he had made a lantern or something he could attach to himself so he could always be able to see.

The guilt surrounding Gregg’s failure to stop Eide made him feel obligated to kill as many imps and whatever other monsters this game had as possible. After about thirty minutes of wandering, Gregg heard something moving towards him from behind. It was fast. Gregg barely managed to lean to the side before a claw just grazed his face.

“Shit!”, he harshly whispered to himself, touching the wound and feeling blood. He heard the creature running again. This one was faster than the imps and it wasn’t large enough to be an ogre. Gregg dodged it completely this time, attempting to strike himself but missing. Trying to get out his flashlight would most likely be suicide so he had to rely on his hearing. The constant noise of fans made this difficult. He picked up the sound again and swung pre-emptively. He missed, the creature taking the opportunity to pounce on Gregg, clawing him up considerably before jumping off and moving back out of sight to prepare another strike. Gregg felt a large amount of blood running down his legs. He felt weak.

You have to run.

No! I need to kill this thing!

No, you don’t.

I’m the reason this thing is as powerful as it is. It’s my responsibility to end its existence.

No, it’s not. Dying here will only screw the session more.

I need to—

Shut up! You need to get your shit together! There are people out there who need you! They don’t care about what happened with Eide. They care about you and they don’t want you to die! Now, run!

Gregg couldn’t argue with this voice in his head so he ran as fast as he could in his weakened state. The creature was closing in when a gate appeared. Gregg ran faster and leaped through, leaving the creature confused as to where his victim just went. Gregg has taken the first steps to be free of his guilt and self-doubt. His friends wouldn’t be his friends if he wasn’t a good person.

After jumping through the portal, Gregg was back at the Snack Falcon. He bandaged himself up and changed out of his bloodied clothes before proceeding to collapse on the floor out of exhaustion, falling into a deep sleep. He woke up in a room unfamiliar to him. The room was
yellow and he was wearing a yellow nightgown. He couldn’t remember how he got there. He vaguely remembered bleeding. There were no wounds on him, though. Looking out the window, Gregg saw what appeared to be a city filled with people who were purely white. He decided to go and introduce himself to the locals.

Angus made quick work of his first gate, killing everything with ease. Magic was overpowered in this game and Angus liked it. It made him feel powerful like he could truly make a difference in his life. The universe didn’t care about them and he was the only one who understood that so he was the only one who could fight it.

Angus’ planet was covered in mazes and snow. There were non-stop blizzards 24-7. For most people new to the area, it would probably be incredibly difficult to navigate but when Angus saw some locals, he found out he could read minds. Within seconds, he had the collective knowledge of a small village about his surroundings. He walked up to a shop and decided to see what they had in stock. They carried various food items as well as these strange items which had strange names, all of which were related to music and symbols which he didn’t recognize next to them. They cost a fortune in boondollars so he couldn’t buy them to find out what they did and it seemed even the shopkeeper didn’t know. He waved to the owner as he left, fully intending to return later for the mysterious items.

After some more searching, Angus found his gate in a seemingly random spot. He was about to enter when he heard various noises in the direction of the town. Where most people would be sprinting back to help the townsfolk, Angus debated the options in his head. Going back to help would use up time, time he could be using to progress in SBURB. Besides, if the town wasn’t destroyed now, it would no doubt be attacked again later, right? On the other hand, there were those mysterious items… and Angus supposed he probably shouldn’t let innocent people die.

Angus easily cleared out the invaders and saved the town. The shop owner from earlier offered him the cheapest of the expensive-as-fuck items. Angus gladly accepted but instead of receiving an item, he suddenly uncovered a technique that he would never have thought of on his own. The ability in question was cerebral cadenza. Happy with his new ability and looking forward to using it, Angus bid farewell to the town once more as he returned to his gate. He wouldn’t be forced to wait long to try out his new skill because when he reached the gate, a cyclops was in front of it.

Running towards the cyclops, Angus was eager to show off his new ability, even if no one was around to see it. He focused on the skill and what happened next was amazing, at least to Angus. Before him lied a plethora of possibilities for what could happen next. Angus saw clearly every way he could manipulate the cyclops’ mind and how he could use it to manipulate its actions in the next two seconds or so. Two seconds may seem insubstantial but to Angus, it was the key to victory. There wasn’t a path Angus could take to end this fight in two seconds, but he found one that left the cyclops on the ground, waiting to be finished off. Angus came out of his trance and followed the path he chose. The cyclops slammed the ground but Angus already knew this was coming and he dodged behind it. He then thrust both of his wands into the cyclops’ leg and fired, severing it. The cyclops fell and Angus went to finish it off with a point-blank blast to the head. It died but Angus suddenly felt exhausted. Using the ability really drained him. He guessed that such a powerful technique should be hard to use. He stepped through the gate and went to ask what the techniques were, exactly. He had a slight idea, but more information was needed to get the full picture.

Selmers, Like Dave said, was steamrolling her first gate. All of the enemies were jokes. She, too, had found a town and wondered what the strange items were. She reached the end gate after a few minutes and was actually kind of disappointed by how easy it was. When she got out, she decided to alchemize stuff to pass time. Selmers combined a copy of Mr. Chazokov’s telescope and her
hunting rifle to create the Lunar Lance, a very sleek looking sniper rifle. She also found an old sci-fi movie and created a laser rifle with it, in case she needed a faster fire rate. She made a pair of rocket boots which she thought should come in handy later. After all that, Selmers started building Bea’s house some more.

Bea hated her planet. It was a constant reminder of her life before the game. Trapped in a job she hated so she could support herself and her family. All around her were factories where the locals were forced to work or be jailed. Work your life away or give up on any hope you had of a future. Those were the options. She wished she could help them but she had a job to do.

At one point, Bea was attempting to sneak by a pack of imps when she ran into a group of refugees. They were trying to escape their lives in the factories. Bea heard footsteps approaching, eventually revealing a group of soldiers. It was obvious what they were there for. Bea assumed a protective stance and told the people behind her to run. They did this, leaving Bea to face the law enforcement herself. She counted three of them. She didn’t know how capable they were as fighters so she stayed back, waiting for them to attack.

The soldiers motioned for one of them to chase after the escapees. Bea immediately cut them off and engaged them in a fight. Her adversaries carried spears, which were difficult to fight with a knife. The two other soldiers quickly joined in the fight, forcing Bea into a bad position. Bea decided to run and lead them away from the people who escaped. She was successful but they were catching up with her when a gate appeared. Bea had almost made it when she felt a sharp pain in her chest. She looked down to see a spearhead sticking through. It was pulled out and she collapsed, struggling to breathe and coughing up blood. Leaving her for dead, the soldiers walked away casually.

Bea wasn’t going to die here. She couldn’t. Her session would fail without her. She crawled through the portal, reappearing at her house. The last thing she saw was her kernel sprite rushing towards her before she lost consciousness.

Mae went to check her chat and talk to John as well as to see if anyone else was back.

MB: Is anyone there?

GT: I’m still here.

AD: I’m back as well.

GT: I was thinking and I thought about something that would be useful to us.

MB: What is it?

GT: Everyone should make portable communication devices, like phones or anything you can access this chat on.

AD: How would we do that?

GT: Just alchemize your computer with a phone. If you don’t have one, Get the code from someone else.

AD: Mae, can I have the code for your phone?

MB: Sure.

Mae sent the code for her phone to Angus.
MB: No poking around on it. I have some very private stuff on there.

AD: No promises.

MB: No!

AD: Ok, fine. I won’t look.

MB: Thank you.

Mae and Angus both made a device capable of accessing the group chat from anywhere and tried it out.

MB: Wow. This actually works. I always wished they had made this into an app.

AD: This is good. It’ll let us communicate even when we’re off doing a gate or something. Also, I know this is off topic but I wanted to ask about this thing that one of my planets’ locals gave me. It works like an ability and there were more but they were expensive.

GT: You got a fraymotif already!?

AD: Is that what they’re called?

GT: Yes. Essentially, they are abilities that are based on your aspect. Some can be done solo but the more powerful ones will include multiple party members. You should collect as many as possible before the final boss. They are extremely powerful and could change the course of a battle if applied properly.

AD: Good to know.

MB: Aw, no fair. I want crazy new abilities, too.

GT: Mae, you need to build a jetpack and get to Bea’s house NOW! I sent you the code.

MB: What? Why?

GT: Bea is dying!

MB: What the hell?!

GT: You need to get there before it’s too late!

MB: How will I be able to help? I’m not a doctor!

GT: I’ll explain it when you get there. Now, GO!

Mae rushed to make the jetpack. She knew that her fourth gate would lead her to Bea’s planet but how would she find her house. She didn’t have time to come up with an answer before she was on Bea’s planet. She was worried to see Bea’s planet covered in factories full of slaves and prisons where people who refused to work went to rot. She headed up and eventually saw Bea’s house in the distance. Once Mae was there, she saw Bea’s body, lifeless on the ground and in a pool of blood as her kernel sprite tried desperately to heal her. After landing and sprinting over to Bea, Mae checked her pulse. There was none. Mae tried again and again to find one. Desperately, Mae tried performing CPR. It wasn’t working.

“No, dammit! I won’t let you die! You are not dying on me!”, Mae screamed as she continued
pumping her arms on Bea’s chest and blowing air into her mouth. Her phone buzzed. John would know what to do! He has to have an answer.

GT: Listen, Bea’s dead. Cpr isn’t going to bring her back. You can bring her back to life, though. You need to kiss her. Full-on kissing. No holding back. It may seem messed up but it’s the only way she’s coming back.

Mae complied without hesitation, bringing her friend’s corpse in for a kiss. It felt weird but she kept doing it. Bea was still dead, though.

MB: It’s not working! Why is it not working?!

GT: Calm down. She’s alive. She’s not here, though. When you kiss someone to bring them back to life, they enter the body of their dream self. Everyone has one. This process can’t be done again. If Bea dies again, it’ll be permanent. You still need to help her, though. Go back home and go to sleep. You’ll wake up on Derse, the planet housing your dream body as well as those of Bea, Selmers, and Bombshell. Unfortunately, everyone on Derse wants all of you dead. You need to be there to help Bea escape.

MB: Ok.

Mae returned home. She was covered in blood and had to explain the situation to her parents. They offered her a sleeping pill but Mae declined. She was exhausted so sleep should come easily enough. She went up to her bed, laid down, and fell asleep.

Gregg had introduced himself to the people in the city and he was able to gather a lot of information. First, he was on a planet named Prospit, home to the prospitans. Prospit was involved in a war with another planet, Derse, for control of Skaia, which was a planet in the center of both. The battle had stayed in a stalemate until recently. Derse was beginning to drive back the prospitans. They had stronger forces that began to overwhelm Prospit. Gregg felt another pang of guilt, knowing that Eide was what made the dersites more powerful.

After being caught up with the events of the war and becoming friendly with the prospitans, Gregg wasn’t sure what to do. His room is empty. He looked up at the clouds and saw glimpses of something. It was hard to fully make out so he decided to leave it for now. He went back to bed and fell asleep, waking up back in the Snack Falcon. His body ached. This was partly caused by sleeping on the floor of a convenience store as well as the large gashes that covered his chest and abdominal region. He stood, stretched, and went to check his chat. He was surprised by everything that had happened while he was asleep. He was only asleep for a short while, maybe an hour and Bea had apparently died but was brought back to life when Mae kissed her and now they’re both their dream selves on Derse, attempting to rescue Bea.

AD: How’s Gregg doing? Has he finished his gate yet?

GT: Yeah. He’s back at the Snack Falcon, sleeping.

AD: I would expect him to be the last person to fall asleep. Did something happen in his first gate? I think I might go check on him.

GT: No.

AD: Why not?

GT: Gregg’s fine, I promise.
AD: And what if I don’t trust you?

GT: I have done nothing but help you on this quest and you think I’m lying?

AD: You’re acting very suspicious right now.

GT: I’m telling you, Gregg is fine. You need to focus on the game.

AD: I’m checking on him.

GT: Wait! Fine, I was lying. Gregg is actually asleep because, in the first gate, he received some pretty bad wounds from an encounter with a strange new enemy.

AD: How bad are we talking?

GT: Well, his chest and stomach areas are completely wrapped in bandages. It was bad enough for him to fall unconscious when he had finished treating them.

AD: That is NOT fine! What made you think that was fine!? 

GT: I knew that if I told you, you would go and try to help him.

AD: You were right! I’m going right now! I can’t believe you would hide something like that from me.

Angus took the jetpack code, made a jet pack, and made his way to the third gate. Since Gregg was his server player and there were eight of them, Angus didn’t have a gate directly leading to the Snack Falcon so he would be forced to use someone else’s gate. He also had to avoid using anyone’s seventh gate as it would lead him to a denizen, which he wasn’t ready for. Angus entered Mae’s sixth gate and found himself surrounded by darkness and the sound of fans. Was this Gregg’s planet? He felt sorry that this is what Gregg had to deal with on his planet. He soon saw the Snack Falcon in the distance.

GL: Angus, I’m fine!

GT: It’s too late. He left and forgot to take his new phone with him.

GL: I guess it’ll be good to finally see someone other than myself and those monsters.

GT: That’s great and all, but we’re on a time limit and this visit is going to take away from that time.

GL: Relax, dude. Sometimes, we need a break from all of the shit that plagues our everyday lives, this included. I almost died! I need a bit to calm down. It’s okay for us to have these moments to even out the madness.

Gregg heard the sounds of a jetpack landing and he turned around to see Angus. He ran to Angus and embraced him in a heart-warming hug.

“Bug! You’re okay!”, Angus exclaimed.

“Of course, I’m okay. I’m too cool to die on my first gate.”, replied Gregg slightly cockily but still grateful that Angus was there.

“I was so worried about you.”
“Don’t worry about that. I can take care of myself. Still, thanks for coming. I needed someone to talk to in person.” They were both crying, overjoyed at being able to see each other again. They hadn’t realized how much they missed each other amidst all of the chaos surrounding this session.

After a few more moments of hugging, Angus said, “Let me replace your bandages for you. They’re probably dirty from laying on the floor.”

“Thanks. I’d like that.”, Gregg responded. Angus removed the bandages and was appalled at the size of the wounds.

“Geez, how did this happen?”, asked Angus as he inspected the cuts for any sign of infection.

“This goddamn monster attacked me and it wasn’t like anything I’ve faced before. It was so fast. I couldn’t touch it. When I tried, it found an opening and effed me up pretty bad.” Gregg winced as Angus applied disinfectant to his wounds.

“I wish I could help you but I haven’t seen anything like that yet. The best you can do is craft better equipment and try to be ready next time.”, Angus advised. He had just about finished applying the bandages when Gregg decided to add, “I almost wanted to stay but some voice in my head kept telling me to leave. Looking back, I’m glad it did. I was being reckless, letting my emotions take control, I know that… Can I ask you something?”

“What is it?”, Angus urged.

“Be honest. Are you all disappointed in me? Like, as a person? I screw up so much that I can’t help but wonder why you keep me around, why you love me? My life had only been a series of messes and fuck-ups before this game and even now, I’m still making mistakes. I almost let myself die. That would have ruined the entire session. Eide hijacked my sprite and people are still suffering the consequences. I don’t deserve any of you so why am I still here?”

Gregg was crying again, this time out of guilt and sorrow. Angus never knew exactly what to do in these situations. He felt a disconnect from peoples’ feelings and emotions. He felt a lack of empathy for others. He wished he could understand these things better. Nonetheless, Angus did feel for Gregg’s situation. They shared a connection that opened Angus up to better understanding Gregg’s emotions. Gregg was the only person Angus felt he could truly connect with on a deep, personal level.

“Bug, it’s hard for me to understand what you’re going through but the reason we love you, the reason I love you, is because you always seem so happy and free. In a group where all of us have been through extreme hardships, you were always the one that gave us hope, something to strive for. We all wanted to be free of Possum Springs and you being so determined to escape with me made all of us happy and hopeful for our chance to leave. You are our group’s source of happiness and optimism and seeing you like this, knowing this is what you manage to put a smile over every day makes me feel horrible. Gregg, we all love you so please, stop thinking these things about yourself because they’re not true.”

Angus’ speech seemed to spark something in Gregg. A few moments later, he stood, new found resolve in his eyes and said, “Thank you. I promise, as long as I can stand and fight, I’ll get us out of this living hell and I will give everyone the freedom they deserve. We’ve been through too much to accept anything less than that.” Angus was once again greeted to everything he loved about Gregg. He couldn’t stand it when Gregg was upset.

“Just remember that we’re in this together. Don’t go and get yourself hurt or killed when one of us can help, okay?”, Angus requested.
“Aye, aye, cap’n.”, Gregg said cheerfully.

“Also, be sure to create something portable to access the chat with. Being able to fly should help as well. The code for a jetpack is in the chat. Thanks to Selmers, we can build much more than we could if she hadn’t exploited her time powers.”

“Got it.”

“I should probably get going. We still have a game to win.”

“Bye! Thank you for coming. It really helped.”

“No problem, bug.” Angus then left, flying back to his apartment. He was happy to be able to help Gregg. Bea was still in trouble, though. He hoped she was okay. All he could hope was that Mae could get Bea out of Derse. After returning home, Angus went to his computer.

GT: Good, you’re back.

AD: Okay, I have some questions for you.

GT: Ask away.

AD: First, what did you mean when you said there was a time limit?

GL: I think I might know. Does it have to do with the war between Derse and Prospit?

GT: Actually, that’s exactly what it’s about. The dersites are always destined to win the war unless you stop them. If they win, the reckoning will occur and Skaia will be destroyed 24 hours after. The session would be over.

GL: What even is Skaia, anyways?

GT: Skaia can be found at the center of all of your planets. It contains a planet known as the battlefield, which is where the war takes place. The reason everyone is building up their houses is that once you defeat the black king and his army, you will build grist rigs on top of the houses that will pump everyone’s grist into Skaia for the ultimate alchemy. I’ll explain the process in more detail once we get there. For now, just focus on passing your gates and reaching your denizen.

AD: Okay, second question. How exactly are you able to see what all of us are doing. How did you know that Bea was dying or that Gregg was injured?

GT: Well, some of my friends made the technology capable of watching over us at any point on our timeline before and during our session. They gave us advice much like I’m doing now. They mostly wanted to see how we managed to screw over their session but we can use it to see and communicate with other universes as well, such as yours.

AD: Does that mean you can see how things turn out later in our session?

GT: No. I could see everything up until the day you all entered the game and it’s just static after that.

AD: Okay, final question, why are you keeping these things from us?

GT: I can’t give you too much information or I might create a doomed timeline. If we deviate from the path too much, your timeline is destined to die. I want to help you as much as I can but I can’t give you all of the answers right away. Right now, you need to just continue the game and you’ll
be fine.

AD: Fine. I’m willing to give you another chance but you better not keep something as serious as Gregg’s injuries or anyone else’s for that matter from me. We need to know these things so we can help each other.

GT: Fine, I promise there won’t be any more secrets.

GL: To be fair, I was fine.

AD: Gregg, those cuts were not fine. You could have gotten an infection and you don’t have a sprite there to heal you if something happens.

GT: Let’s just be done with this for now. Once everyone is back, we can take a rest and get some sleep. It’ll be good for everyone to get acquainted with Derse and Prospit before we continue. Luckily, you two, as well as Lori and Germ, are Prospit dreamers. You won’t have people trying to kill you. If your dream-self dies, it’s not that big a deal. You just wake up and don’t have an extra life anymore. Bea is the only one in real danger.

GL: I guess we’ll get to meet again sooner than we thought.

AD: That’s perfectly fine with me.

Gregg got the code for a bed from Angus and soon, they were both asleep.

Bea woke up, breathing heavily. Wasn’t she dead? She remembered getting impaled and falling unconscious on the ground next to her house. Where was she? Purple walls surrounded her and she wore purple robes. Was this the afterlife? She stood up and looked outside. She was in a tower above a city. Everything was purple and the people were completely black. Looking to the sky, Bea caught glimpses of horrible monstrosities. Bea stumbled back, hyperventilating. Was this hell? What had Bea done to deserve this? She was busy calming herself down when a familiar black cat flew into her window, which was left open.

“Bea, we need to go, NOW!”, exclaimed Mae as she grabbed Bea and flew back outside.

“MAE, WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING! PUT ME DOWN!”, Bea screamed as she was dragged off to god knows where.

“Shut up! You’re going to get us caught!”, Mae whispered harshly.

“By who?!?” Bea’s question was immediately answered when an arrow struck Mae’s leg. She looked down to see archers firing at them.

“Shit! That’s who!” More arrows flew by them as Mae went to land in an empty alleyway. “Bea, help me pull this out!”

“No. You need to push the arrow through. The shape of the arrowhead makes it almost impossible to pull out.”, Bea explained as she went over to help her.

“Well, help me do that, then.” Bea helped push the arrow through in the least painful way possible. Mae still struggled greatly not to scream or cry as they did this.

Bea then asked, “You need to explain to me what’s going on here.” Mae explained everything about her dying and John telling Mae to kiss her corpse and go to sleep to help her escape Derse. “So, I really did die.”, muttered Bea.
“My plan was to fly you out but they’ll just arrow us to death if I do that. It’s lucky I figured out how to fly because John never said anything. You probably can’t fly, though, because your real-self died and now this is kinda your real-self, I think.”

“So, what do we do?”, Bea asked.

“We can try to hijack an airship. They couldn’t shoot us with arrows if we were in a ship.”

“How do we get an airship?”, Bea continued to question.

“From the military airship hangar.”, said Mae as if that was obvious.

“Oh, okay. Let’s just go steal an airship from the most likely heavily guarded ship hangar. I’m sure we won’t die if we just waltz on in and politely ask them not to stab and/or shoot us.”

“Do you have a better idea?” asked Mae.

Bea sighed, “No I guess not. Let’s just go. Also, don’t think that kiss means anything. I was dead.”

“Come on, who wouldn’t want some of this?”, said Mae sarcastically.

“I think the real question is who would want some?”, Bea replied, also sarcastic.

“That’s just mean!”

“Life’s a bitch, ain’t it?”

“Are you sure we couldn’t even maebea be together?”, asked Mae, a smile growing ever so wide as she struggled not to laugh at her own horrible pun.

“Mae, you are hereby banned from ever making puns again. Also, the answer is still no.”

“Aw, come on, it wasn’t that bad.”

“Yes, it was, now can we get going?”

“Fiiiine!” Mae groaned as she said this. “How am I gonna walk?”

“Just float off the ground or something.”

“I’m too weak. I think I need you to carry me.” Mae was acting purposefully bad to try and elicit some laughter from her friend.

“Well, that’s too bad. I guess I’ll just have to leave you. Wouldn’t want you weighing me down.”

“Are you trying to say something about my weight?”, Mae said with fake shock in her voice.

“I’m trying to say get up and let’s go.” Bea began walking away, Mae soon following behind her, flying.

“Where exactly is this hangar?”, asked Bea.

“It’s in the castle up ahead.”

“Do you have a plan for how we’re going to get inside?”

“Not really.”
“Great. Good to know my life depends on breaking into a castle that’s probably swarming with guards without a plan. It really boosts my confidence.”

“We’ll be fine. We just need to be stealthy.”, Mae tried to reassure her friend.

“That’s some stellar advice you’ve got there. ‘Be stealthy’, sure is a great plan.”

“Come on, it can’t be that hard.” Mae immediately regretted saying those words as the castle fully came into view. Like Bea had said, guards were swarming the castle. Openings seemed to be nonexistent. There was a silver lining, however. The launch pad for ships was in plain view, with the hangar being just behind it.

“We should just make a run for it. Get in a ship before they can kill us.”, Mae suggested.

“Are you crazy?! That’s a horrible idea!”, Bea contested.

“Too late, I’m doing it. If I die, keep running. I’ll be fine.”

“Wait! Stop! What are you doing!”, Bea protested as Mae grabbed her and began flying to the hangar at full speed. “You’re going to get us killed!”

“Just trust me. We can make it.”, Mae tried to reassure Bea but failed to do so. The alarms were raised and arrows began raining down around the two friends. They were almost there. Just a few more seconds and they would be home free. At that moment, an arrow struck Mae in the back, causing her to fall and drop Bea just outside of the hangar.

“No!”, screamed Bea as she panicked over what to do. She couldn’t let her best friend die.

“Leave me. I’ll be fine. I’ll wake up and everything will be fine.”, Mae said weakly.

“Even still, I won’t just leave you here!”

“Please, go. You can’t die here. You have to survive.” Bea knew Mae was right but she didn’t want to admit it.

“Fine. You better be alive when I get back.”

“I will, I promise. Now, leave.” Bea reluctantly left Mae to die, hopping in one of the single pilot ships and realizing she didn’t know how to fly it. Guards began storming in to apprehend the two of them. After fiddling with the controls, Bea was able to start the ship and she began lifting off. She flew away, arrows bouncing right off of the ship. She saw a variety of planets and was able to spot her own. On the way home, however, the dersites hadn’t given up on her. Two other fighter pilots followed her and began firing guns at her. Bea knew these would probably be able to damage the ship. Doing her best to perform evasive maneuvers, she was able to spin around and begin firing back. One of the ships was destroyed and Bea was feeling confident. She found a button that launched missiles and pressed it, sending a barrage at the other pilot, destroying them but not before they were able to blow a hole in one of Bea’s wings. She had a hard time controlling the airship as she approached her house. Apparently, Selmers had built a landing strip for her. Her landing was sloppy and the plane was very badly damaged but Bea had survived. She stepped out and her sprite was there to meet her.

“It’s good to have you back, Bea.”, said the sprite, relieved to see their daughter safe. “Here’s your stuff. We figured you wouldn’t want to loot your corpse so we did it for you.”

“Thanks. I’m gonna go change out of these Derse pajamas. They look awful.”, said Bea as she
grabbed the stuff her parents handed to her. She changed and went to message Mae. She needed to know she was okay.

BS: Mae, are you there?

MB: Yep. Despite getting shot by arrows twice, I am quite alive. My dream self is dead as hell, though.

BS: Yeah, getting shot will do that to you.

MB: At least we’re both alive, right?

BS: Yeah. I prefer being alive to dying.

MB: Dying sucked. I feel bad for you.

BS: It wasn’t exactly my best moment but we all have our off days.

MB: I guess but dying hurts so much. I was in so much pain that entire time.

BS: Same here.

MB: We should rejoin the group chat. You should read up on everything that’s happened so we can continue beating this game.

BS: Ok.

They both read everything they missed in the group chat. Selmers, Bombshell, and Germ had returned, all talking about how easy their first gates were. Lori had yet to return. She was taking the longest out of everybody to finish her first gate.

The first gate was a struggle for Lori. She wasn’t doing enough damage and the imps could teleport now. Her dodging and blocking were okay but it was taking too long to kill things. Lori wondered if she was actually prepared for this. These monsters were much harder compared to the ones at her house. What if she ran into an ogre or some new enemy she hadn’t seen before? How much more powerful would they be? It didn’t help that the blood-filled rivers and overall dreary atmosphere dampened her mood a considerable amount. It was just like being in a nightmare or horror movie. Her thoughts halted when she saw a small village of lizard people.

The residents of this village seemed to get along nicely. The people waved hi to each other as they walked by and you could see some of them holding friendly conversations with people they had just met. One person tried talking to Lori, but she couldn’t understand it. These people spoke in a language unfamiliar to her. She was able to gather that the creature wanted Lori to follow them and did so. The lizard led her to a large group of them. They all seemed extremely happy to see her for some reason.

One of the people, who seemed to be the leader, walked up to Lori and started speaking to the crowd. The crowd soon cheered and Lori was dragged through some woods into a clearing. In the clearing, houses laid dormant and destroyed, monsters were everywhere, and the lizard people seemed to want Lori to lead them to fight. Lori was terrified. She wanted to say no but she couldn’t bring herself to let down this village. She was important to them and they wanted to take back their land from these monsters.

Revving her chainchete, Lori reluctantly walked into the fray. The people following her let out war cries as they began swarming the monsters. Lori was soon consumed by her need to help these
people and the adrenaline of battle and was taking out imps left and right. An ogre approached and Lori was soon seeing it’s leg off like she had done with the ogre blocking the first gate. It took longer to cut all the way through and Lori was forced to dodge a few swings and slams but she eventually cut through before decapitating the ogre as it fell.

Lori felt great. The fog of war empowered her and gave her resolve. She had a reason to fight and that gave her the strength to take on anything or so she thought. At that moment, a cyclops stomped towards her. She was soon aware that this was the last monster between these people and their lost land. The remaining lizard people began to attack the cyclops and Lori was soon with them.

The cyclops seemed unfazed by anything they did to it. Lori couldn’t cut through its leg. It was too tough. Soon after, the cyclops fired a black laser out of its eye and straight through a bunch of the fighters, completely disintegrating them. The rest of the lizards saw this and began to flee. Some of them were unfortunate enough to be shot at by the cyclops and killed instantly. Lori, however, continued to fight. She wasn’t going to let these people down. They had lost too many for this to be for nothing.

Lori dodged multiple lasers and continued to strike the cyclops at different points on its body, hoping to find a weak spot. She wasn’t making any progress until she thought to attack its eye. How would she reach the eye? The cyclops was too tall. Suddenly, Mae’s triple jump came to mind. Lori had seen Mae use it to traverse the rooftops multiple times. After putting some distance between her and the cyclops, Lori ran and began jumping. To her delight, she was given a boost to her height on the third jump. Lori swung at the eye but only ended up cutting through air as the cyclops teleported. An impact was felt on Lori’s back as she was punched and sent flying into the ruins of an old building.

Standing up, Lori was caught off guard by a laser flying towards her. She managed to jump out of the way last second falling flat on her stomach as she reached the ground. Standing again, Lori was met with a fist landing in front of her as she stumbled backward. In the moment, Lori grabbed the arm and was flung up in the air as the cyclops prepared to finish the fight with a laser. Lori saw this and threw her chainchete down, hitting the monster directly in the pupil before landing on the eye and driving it all the way in, causing the cyclops to explode into grist.

As it turns out, the people who managed to escape hid in the woods to see if Lori would prevail and were there to cheer and congratulate her on her success. I was at that moment that a gate opened in front of Lori. After saying goodbye to everyone and promising them she’d be back even though they may not even be able to understand her, Lori stepped through the gate, leaving the lizard people to rebuild what had been lost. She returned home and went to get in contact with the rest of the group and figure out what to do next.
LM: Hey guys, I’m back!

MB: How was the first gate?

LM: It was really difficult but I managed to reclaim a bunch of land for these lizard people.

MB: That’s cool. Everyone except for me and Bea is sleeping so you should get some rest, too.

LM: Why aren’t you two sleeping?

MB: We both kinda died and now, we don’t have dream selves.

LM: If you both died, how are you still here?

MB: Just read the chat log. I don’t feel like explaining all of that.

LM: This is really confusing. So, if your real-self dies, you can kiss them to bring back their dream self but you died as your dream self. Did Bea have to kiss you? Also, can I have the code for a phone?

MB: No. If your dream-self dies and your real-self is still alive, then you just wake up and yes, you can have the code for a phone.

Mae sent Lori a code for a phone.

BS: What you did was still stupid.

MB: It worked, didn’t it?

BS: Yeah, but now, if you die, we can’t bring you back.

GT: I have to agree with Bea on this one. What you did was reckless and now both you and Bea are going to have to jump some extra hurdles to god tier.

MB: What do you mean? How much more of a hurdle could we have to jump than killing ourselves?

GT: Your planet’s quest bed won’t work if either of your selves is dead. The only way to god tier now is to go to the center of Derse and die on the sacrificial slabs within.

BS: You mean we need to go back?!

GT: Yes.

BS: Oh, hell no! I am not going back there!

GT: Technically, you never have to god tier to beat the game but it would be a massive disservice to yourself and your team if you didn’t.

MB: Come on, Bea. We can go together.

BS: You actually want to go?!
MB: Yeah. We can get Selmers, Bombshell, and anyone who’s god tiered before us to help us raid Derse. It’ll be so cool!

BS: If either of us dies, we can’t come back again. You realize this, right?

MB: Yeah, but the reward is godly powers and dorky costumes. It’ll be worth it.

BS: Can we talk about this later? We should be working on doing more in the game.

MB: Actually, could I go to sleep? You may have a whole new body that’s been sleeping for however long you were awake before you died but I’m still in my normal body which hasn’t slept in soooo loooong.

GT: I wouldn’t expect a peaceful sleep. You don’t have a dream self so your dreams will take place in the furthest ring, which is crawling with horrifying eldritch monsters that could easily traumatize you if you’re not prepared.

MB: I’ve dealt with eldritch monsters before, I’ll be fine.

GT: Okay, but don’t say I didn’t warn you.


Mae and Lori left the conversation and went to sleep.

BS: I guess if everyone else is leaving, I’ll just go grind and stuff. Bye, John.

GT: Bye.

Bea began stabbing the shit out of some imps. Take that, low-level monsters we could always one-shot! The grist they dropped was worthless thanks to Selmers’ exploits but at least she was climbing her echeladder, albeit slowly. While she grinded, Bea figured she’d build some new equipment. A jet pack was a good start. She thought about what might happen if she combined the jet pack with her Hell’s Razor. It created the Inferno Edge. As the name implied, the knife was on fire but it now had rockets on the back that not only propelled the blade forwards at high speeds but also made the fire larger when used.

Looking up, Bea saw that her second gate was open to her. After some arguing with herself, Bea decided to enter. Surprisingly, John didn’t try to stop her like she had expected. Bea saw some enemies from the first gate as she neared the top. They weren’t difficult. She hadn’t died to any of the monsters. No, she died to lizard people. It was embarrassing, to be honest. She could take down giant ogres with ease but some tiny soldiers were able to impale her and kill her.

Upon entering her second gate, Bea found herself in a dying forest area. This was Germ’s planet, The Land of Forests and Death. Why was it that everyone’s planets were so dreary? The residents of Germ’s planet seemed to be suffering from famine and disease. Bea hoped she wouldn’t catch anything from being here.

After walking a considerable distance, Bea found herself staring into a mass of fighting and bodies. The lizard people were at each other’s throats and the monsters in the area took advantage of this, killing stragglers and leaving bodies strewn about the battlefield. The whole place smelled of death, corpses lying about that were at least a few days old. Why were they fighting? Bea decided to investigate.

Wading into the battle, Bea was forced to fend off many imps and other creatures. One new
monster she encountered was a basilisk. It shot fire at Bea as soon as it saw her. Bea dodged and stabbed it. It gave a generous amount of grist but not as much as ogres or cyclopes. As Bea reached the center of the conflict, it became apparent what the cause for the massacre was. There was a cart full of supplies that were the source of the onslaught.

Bea wanted to stop the fighting but she didn’t know how. Suddenly, her classpect came to mind, a sylph of blood. One who heals blood or through blood. Blood could mean the bonds between family and friends. Bea climbed on top of the cart and shouted, “EVERYONE STOP FIGHTING!!!”

Somehow, her voice cut through the battle and everyone ceased the fighting.

“Why are you fighting over something as simple as supplies when you could be helping each other? Stop this pointless killing and work together to fix this broken nation. You should be acting like family, not enemies.”

This speech seemed to sway the entire crowd and they even seemed to be apologizing to each other when the various monsters began attacking again. This time, however, the lizard people were able to band together along with the help of Bea and drive the vile creatures away. Soon, the people were negotiating and divvying out supplies based on the needs of different communities. Groups were sent out to gather more supplies. Bea was happy she had helped this nation take its first steps to recovery. The exit gate opened and Bea passed through.

Bea returned to her laptop to see if anyone was awake. They most likely weren’t. She had only been gone for about an hour. Unsurprisingly, no one was on so she decided to build Germ’s house up to the second gate. A few minutes later, Bea had finished and was unsure of what to do.

BS: John, are you there?

GT: Yes. What do you need?

BS: I need something to do.

GT: All I can really tell you is to grind for a few hours. There’s not much else for a blood player to do. How far up are you on your echeladder?

BS: Holy shit! That last gate gave me like a tenth of my echeladder! All I did was convince a group of people not to kill each other!

GT: That makes sense. Whenever someone uses their aspect powers for any reason, they gain levels on their echeladder. It’s why Selmers is so far up hers.

BS: Ok, cool! Overall, I’m about a third of the way up.

GT: That’s good. You’ll find yourself putting more distance between you and your party members if you continue using your powers.

BS: I guess I’ll go grind some more, then. See you later.

GT: See ya.

As Bea grinded, her friends were exploring Prospit and Derse. Gregg, Angus, Germ, and Lori
resided on Prospit and were treated with care and respect. The people seemed to hold them in high esteem as they were offered free food and services everywhere they went. They denied most of the offers until someone carrying a mail satchel arrived with a message. It was from the queen and it asked that the four Prospit dreamers meet her asap.

Upon arriving at a large yellow castle, guards immediately displaced themselves to make room for the four to enter. After being led down a large corridor, they arrived at the throne room. The mailperson ran up to the queen and was given a second package. A letter was placed on top of the box that read, “Take this and protect it with your lives. Do not let it fall into the hands of the evil sprite. He will come and when that happens, I will die. There is nothing you can do to save me but you can save yourselves and this kingdom by never letting go of this package. Please, do not tell anyone about this. Only me and those in this room must be allowed to know. If word got out, the kingdom would fall into anarchy. We must keep the peace as long as possible.”

The package contained a ring lined with eight glowing jewels. Angus stepped forward, “Can we have one of your airships. I know a good place to hide this.” The queen nodded and motioned towards the ship hangar.

Gregg intervened, “Wait, you can’t be serious! We can’t just leave her, she’s gonna die!”

“She said there’s nothing we can do. We know the sprite is Eide and he’s too powerful for us. This ring is important. We can’t let Eide take it.”, Angus asserted.

Lori began talking directly to the queen, “There has to be something we can do. Please, let us help you. You’re giving up too easily.” The queen reluctantly called for the guards to escort her out of the room.

“Wait, she was just trying to help! Do you want to die?!”, pleaded Gregg. The queen had him escorted out as well. Germ followed him out, “If she doesn’t want our help, then let her deny it. She knows things we don’t. If that ring is more important than her life, we need to keep it safe, even if it means letting her die. Getting ourselves killed protecting her isn’t going to help anything.”

Gregg didn’t say anything to that. All he could think about was how an entire civilization was about to crumble because of him… No, it’s not his fault. There was nothing he could have done… He just wished there was something he could have done. He was too weak… Stop! Beating yourself up over it won’t do anything. Gregg hadn’t realized he was out of the castle and aimlessly walking until a voice called out to him.

“G-Gregg, are y-you okay?” It was Lori. She was nervous because this was the first time she was meeting all of these people and she had just gotten herself thrown out of the throne room.

Gregg snapped out of his trance, “Uh, Yeah. You’re Lori, right?”

“Yeah.”

“It’s good to meet you. Mae’s told us about you but we never got to actually meet. You probably already know me as Gregg.”, he said, extending his hand out. Lori accepted and shook hands.

“I’m Germ.”, said Germ as he joined the conversation.

“Well, it’s good to meet both of you.” Lori had quickly gotten over her nerves. These people
seemed to be nice, at least from what she’d seen and heard from Mae.

“That was kinda embarrassing, what happened in there.”, Gregg said.

“Yeah, at least you weren’t the only one.” Lori tried to comfort Gregg, but something about him seemed deeply conflicted. His posture was off and he was nervously fiddling with one of his pockets. Lori could sense something was wrong but she decided not to pursue the subject and continued to make small talk.

“Mae told me you two liked to do crimes a lot.”

“Yeah, that was what I was saddest about when Angus and I were preparing to leave. Mae had just gotten back and I was going to miss out on a bunch of fun stuff with her. I never wanted to turn back on our plans but it just made me kinda sad. I know this is really selfish but I’m kinda happy this game happened. If we win, we get a new universe and we get to be free while also staying together and getting cool new powers.”

“I get where you’re coming from. Possum Springs was a horror show of a town, like a bad horror movie that never ends. Then, it ended. It feels good to finally be free of that town. The worst part was no one even acknowledged that it was dying. They just kept clinging to false hope. They started killing people! All because they weren’t open to the possibility of change. They wanted everything to stay the same and it killed Possum Springs.”, explained Lori.

“Wow, I guess you have a point. Y’know, Mae said something similar to that when we were in the mines. She said she kinda understood them in a way. She thought that those people were trying to get back what they lost when the town started going to shit. I think that rather than no one acknowledging that the town was dying, everyone already knew and some refused to give up on it. Others, like Angus and I, decided to leave but not everyone had that option so the only thing they could do was try to hold onto what little was left. So, I agree with you when you talk about false hope but I’m pretty sure most people knew Possum Springs was dying.”

Germ then decided to throw in his two-sense, “Honestly, I don’t see why people tried so desperately to keep that crappy town alive. People should have just let it die and moved on. In the long run, it would have been better for everyone.”

“Not everyone could just leave, Germ. Moving is expensive and most people who were still in the town were there because they were poor and didn’t have that money.”, Gregg retorted.

“I’m not saying it would have been easy but at least then, all of those people wouldn’t have died. Casey would still be here with us.” Gregg felt his stomach turn as he was reminded of Casey.

“What was Casey like?”, asked Lori.

“He was just a cool person to be with. He was kind and fun to be around. He tried teaching me how to skateboard once. I then proceeded to crash into a wall and break my arm. Despite how laughable my failure was, he was at my side in seconds to make sure I was okay. He was a great drummer, too. Bea’s computer was fine but it just wasn’t the same. I hate thinking about how pointless his death was. He didn’t die for anything. He was just thrown into some hole in the ground in the hope that it would fix the town. Possum Springs never got better and now it’s gone. It’s even worse thinking about what even happens when you’re thrown down that hole. It’s obvious the black goat exists. What did it do to him?” Gregg’s voice was shaking by the end and tears rolled down his face. There was also anger in his voice, a level of conviction unlike anything Lori had ever seen.
“You can stop. I can tell this is hurting you.”, said Lori.

“We have to kill Eide and the black goat. What if Casey’s still in there, suffering? I can’t live with that possibility haunting me. Before this game, I would get vivid nightmares about what kind of shit it could be doing to Casey and at this point, I have to consider the possibility that they were true. The black goat gave Mae dreams so what if it was showing me them, too?”, Gregg finished. If he continued talking, he might have a mental breakdown. Remembering Casey was breaking him inside.

Germ pointed up and said, “Look, Angus is flying off. Something’s following him.” Gregg looked up and recognized Eide immediately.

“Shit! We have to follow him! Eide’s gonna kill him!”, Gregg exclaimed.

“But we can’t fly that fast and we don’t even have weapons.”, Lori stated.

After a few moments of consideration, Gregg said, “One of you needs to knock me out. Punch me in the face as hard as you can. I’ll wake up and go to my second gate.”

“Alright.”, said Germ casually as he threw a punch into Gregg’s face, causing him to fall to the ground, unconscious.

Angus made his way to Bea’s house. He knew she would be the only one awake. She would have to protect the box until Angus woke up and could hide it somewhere safer. Bea saw Angus arrive and went to greet him.

“Hey, Angus. What are you doing here?”, asked Bea.

“I need you to protect this box until I wake up. Can you do that?”, Angus requested.

“Sure. What’s in the box?”

“It’s a ring. Eide wants it so it must be important. The queen of Prospit wants us to protect it.”

Bea’s sprite then explained, “That ring is extremely powerful. You must not let it fall into Eide’s hands or he will wreak havoc on your session.” At that moment, Eide arrived.

“I suggest you give the ring to me now or someone’s not leaving this confrontation alive and it certainly won’t be me.”, Eide warned. Angus and Bea stared at Eide in disbelief.

Bea summoned her knife and said, “I’d like to see you try.” Angus turned to look at Bea as if she was insane. They couldn’t fight an eldritch god!

“Fine, I guess we’re doing this the hard way. You only have yourself to blame for what happens next.” Eide was in front of Angus in an instant, taking the ring and blasting Angus back with an energy beam. Bea leaped into the air, using the rockets in her dagger to bring herself to Eide. As she swung, Eide faded into nothing, appearing high above them. He placed the ring on his finger, ready to claim his reward. He was given a pair of legs along with the properties of everything that was prototyped before the game, including himself.

Laughing maniacally, Eide prepared to fire a huge blast at Angus when he felt an impact to his
side. It was Gregg. He had crafted a pair of rocket boots and a jetpack to take him here as fast as possible and he used the rocket boots to slam his foot into Eide. Gregg stored the jetpack in his sylladex in order to gain some mobility. Witchdaggers drawn, Gregg wasn’t about to let Eide take anyone else from him.

“This piece of shit again.”, Eide mumbled under his breath. Gregg propelled himself forward for an attack with his knives. Eide dodged and kicked Gregg into the ground. Some of Gregg’s wounds began to reopen but he didn’t care. He stood and charged at Eide once more. This time, Eide prepared a massive ball of energy to throw at Gregg. Gregg dodged and attempted to stab Eide with both knives. Teleporting behind him, Eide grabbed Gregg’s rocket boots and began slowly crushing them. Gregg was forced to take both of them off and began falling. Angus was there to catch him.

“Bug, you’re going to exacerbate your wounds. They’ve probably reopened already.”, said Angus.

“I can’t let Eide kill you.” Gregg put on his jetpack and flew at Eide again.

“I’m getting tired of you getting in my way.”, stated Eide and he threw a punch so hard into Gregg’s stomach that it caused him to vomit up blood. After destroying the jetpack, Eide teleported down to the ground and threw Gregg down. Angus rushed to his side.

“Bug, are you okay?! Answer me!”, shouted Angus.

“I’m fine.”, asserted Gregg weakly as he tried to stand again.

“Don’t move. Bea’s sprite can heal you. You need to rest.”

Bea’s sprite began to heal Gregg as Bea made a few attempts at hitting Eide. Once Gregg was healed, Eide flew up into the air and charged a beam that would kill all three of them and probably destroy Bea’s house. Everyone froze, terrified.

“DIE!”, Eide screamed when a bat slammed into his face.

“Mae’s here!”, exclaimed Gregg.

“How did you wake up so fast?”, asked Bea.

Mae replied, “Turns out, eldritch horrors are still pretty scary. I saw one and I woke up, terrified. John messaged me telling me to come here. Since when does Eide wear a tacky ring and have legs?”

“That ring gives him insane amounts of power. We can’t touch him.”, explained Bea.

“I can’t even read his mind. Something’s blocking me.”, said Angus.

“I just touched him so I guess I’m just better than you.”, replied Mae sarcastically.

“Hey, I hit him, too.”, said Gregg.

“Yeah, but it was only once and you caught him off guard like Mae just did.”, Angus retorted.

“Why do people keep interrupting me?!”, Eide growled.

“I don’t know, why do you keep trying to kill people, hmm?”, said Mae.

“Alright, that’s it! EVERYONE DIES!!!” Eide was preparing another beam to kill everyone with
until Mae swung her bat into Eide’s hands, causing the beam to destabilize and explode prematurely. While Eide was recovering, the bat struck again, this time on the back of his head.

“Goddamnit! Stop being so fucking annoying!”

“Someone needs to learn to control their language.”, joked Mae.

“I am not a child, you fucking bitch!”

“You sure are acting like one. You should try toning back your anger.”

“FUCK YOU!!!”, screamed Eide as he fired a ball of energy at Mae.

“Oh, I guess we’re playing baseball now.”, said Mae as she swung at the ball with her bat, sending it flying back at Eide. Eide dodged it and a large explosion was seen in the distance.

“Homerun and the crowd goes wild!”, yells Mae as she begins thanking the fake audience.

Eide was breathing heavily in rage, “I said someone is going to die and that is what is going to fucking happen!” He created a blade of black energy and rushed at Bea. He knew if she died, the session would be over. Angus, however, had other plans. He threw himself in front of Bea and was stabbed in the chest by Eide.

“NO!!!”, screamed Gregg as he ran to attack Eide. Soon, both knives were sticking out of Eide as the energy blade dispersed and Eide screamed in pain. Eide saw that he was weakening from the amount of energy he’d been using up and quickly flew away. Angus was left lying on the ground, cold. His heart had been pierced. It was too late for him.

Gregg held Angus’ corpse and began welling up with tears, “Fuck, no! I wasn’t strong enough. You don’t deserve this.” Gregg’s voice was cracking as he struggled to come to terms with the fact that he couldn’t save his boyfriend. Even if he would just wake up, he didn’t deserve to experience that.

“You must learn to control your anger. Your judgment must be calm but cruel.

“Killing them is not enough. We will make them suffer. If they die, I won’t be able to feed on them.”

“To do that, you must learn to control your anger. Your judgment must be calm but cruel.

“I guess I get it. They just make me so mad. I want them to suffer but I also just want them dead.”

You will have both in due time. For now, let us wait and soon, destroying those foolish mortals will be child’s play.
Angus woke, still recovering from being stabbed. He looked out his window and saw Gregg flying in. As he went outside to greet him, Gregg ran up and threw himself into Angus for a loving embrace. “I’m sorry I couldn’t stop him. I’m sorry you had to go through that. I’m sorry I wasn’t good enough to protect you. I’m sorry—”, Angus stopped him in the middle of his rant,

“But, it must have been horrible. Dying like that isn’t something you deserve. You’re too good for that. It should’ve been me instead.” Gregg was crying into Angus. This, on top of everything that constantly weighs on Gregg’s mind, would break most people. He and everyone else have lost so much and Gregg can’t help but feel responsible for most of it.

“I told you to stop talking like that.” Angus was raising his voice. “You need to get your shit together. You’re not the only one with problems.”

“No, that’s not what I meant.”

“It doesn’t matter what you meant. You need to stop all of this self-pity. It’s not helping anyone. You promised me you would stop yet here you are, crying about it again. You need to grow up and get over yourself! You’re hurting the rest of the team!” That was what finally broke Gregg. All he could do is cover his face with his hands and run away, flying back to the Snack Falcon. Even the love of his life thought he was pathetic and worthless.

Angus immediately realized he had been too harsh. He probably made it seem like he hated Gregg when all he wanted was for him to stop hating himself. Angus rushed to make a jet pack and chase after him.

When Gregg returned to the Snack Falcon, he ran to the storage room and slammed the door shut. He then sat against a wall and let himself be consumed by his thoughts. His life swirled around in his head, reminding him of all of his failures. Why did people like him? He was childish and irresponsible and he always found a way to screw everything up. He wanted to change but he was failing at that, too. Did his friends actually like him? Did they only care for him out of pity? Why else would anyone choose to be friends with him?

Angus had decided to grab Mae and Bea on his way to Gregg’s. He knew they would be better at cheering him up than he would. He wished he could be better for Gregg. Angus felt like he may have been part of the reason why. The reason why Gregg thought he wasn’t a good person when he was so much better than Angus hoped he could be. After explaining what happened to Mae and Bea, they were quick to follow him.

Gregg heard people entering the Snack Falcon. He knew it was Angus. He had decided to bring Mae and Bea, too. Why were they here? Angus had made it clear that Gregg was a failure. He was weak. If that was the case, why was he here? The door to the storage room was opened.

“He’s in here.”, Bea called to the other two friends.

Mae ran to the room followed by Angus.

“Gregg, you are going to tell us why you’re sad and we are going to help you, whether you like it or not!” exclaimed Mae in an overly cheerful tone.

“Forget that, already. I’m not worth your time.”
“Bug, I said some things earlier that I shouldn’t have said. I pushed your problems aside and told you to deal with it when we should’ve been fixing it together. I was just mad at you because someone like you doesn’t deserve to go through what you’re going through.”, Angus explained as he went to sit next to Gregg.

Bea added, “Look, I know you and I aren’t exactly the closest friends in this group but I know all of us well enough to know that we can all be pretty shitty sometimes. That’s what makes us family, though. We’re all shitty people but we’re shitty together.”

“Yeah! There’s no one shittier than me. I mean, look at all of my screw-ups. I dropped out of college and moved back in with my parents and almost caused them to lose our house for nothing before proceeding to top it off by being a horrible friend. I’ve had more screw-ups in one week than all of you combined. If anyone’s a horrible person, it’s me but I still work to be a better person and that’s all you can really hope to do in this world. You’re our Gregg. Greggs are supposed to make everyone happy so stop being so depressing and sad because it’s not you.” Mae was rambling, trying to find ways to make one of her best friends feel better.

“We all care about you and we know you do everything you can for us. That’s all we want from you. Please, stop being so hard on yourself. I can’t stand seeing you like this when you deserve so much more.”, Angus finished.

At that moment, Gregg felt more free than he had ever been in his entire life. He needed to hear everything that was just said to him. For the first time, he knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that his friends loved him for who he was. He was no longer weighed down by his fears of inadequacy.

“Thank you.”, Gregg stood up, wiping away his tears, “I think it’s about time I made good on that promise, eh, cap’n?”

“I’d love that, bug.”, replied Angus as he, too, stood.

“Yay! Gregg’s back!” yelled Mae joyfully.

“I guess he is.”, said Bea.

“I should get back to Prospit and tell Lori and Germ what happened.”, said Gregg.

“Sounds good. Come on guys, let the man sleep.”, exclaimed Mae as she forcefully pushed Angus and Bea out of the Snack Falcon.

“Love you, Bug!”, shouted Angus.

“Love you, too, cap’n!”, replied Gregg. Once everyone was gone, Gregg went to his bed and fell asleep instantly. He woke up to his room on Prospit and found Lori and Germ patiently waiting for him to wake up.

“Welcome back.”, Germ greeted.
Chapter 5

Selmers and Bombshell had found each other and decided to start trying to gather information about the black army. They met outside of the castle and began to devise a plan.

“That stunt Mae and Bea pulled really scared them. There are guards everywhere.”, stated Selmers.

“I have an idea. Can you get a time clone to come back and tell us how close we can get without being seen?”, requested Bombshell. At that moment, another Selmers came out of nowhere.

“Behind that building over there is as far as you’re gonna get. Good luck.”, she then disappeared again.

“That is so cool!”, exclaimed Bombshell.

“Thanks. I’ll be right back. I need to go relay the message to my now-past self.” Selmers disappeared for a moment and returned a few seconds later.

“Alright, I’m ready to go when you are. I assume you have a plan for when we get there?”, asked Selmers.

Bombshell replied, “Yeah, I got some cool powers of my own. You’ll see once we get there.”

“Cool, let’s go.” Both of them went to the designated spot and Selmers said, “Okay, we’re here. Show me what you got.” Without saying a word, Bombshell began to focus and soon, Selmers and her were shrinking.

“Nice, we’re tiny now. I should write a poem about this. How are we gonna get into the castle, though? The wall around the castle was impossible to get over before we were tiny and I think we would still be spotted if we went through the front gate.”

“Let’s go to that flower over there and I’ll show ya.”, answered Bombshell. They went to the flower Bombshell had pointed out, which was giant compared to them. Bombshell then shrank the flower down enough for them to climb on it. “After you, m’lady.”, said Bombshell as she motioned for Selmers to step on the flower.

“Why, thank you.”, Selmers responded before climbing on the flower. “I’ve got a poem. I was shrunk with magic powers. Now I ride up on magic flowers. We’re on a quest to invade this castle. I wish it wasn’t such a hassle.”

“Not bad. I was never the artist type. I sometimes wish I was.”

“If you want to be an artist, go for it. I never knew I could write poetry until I went into rehab for my drug addiction.”

“You had a drug addiction?”

“Yeah, I was stealing painkillers from the Ham Panther. I had to serve jail time but rehab helped me recover from my addiction and introduced me to poetry.”, Selmers explained.

“Wow, that’s rough. Y’know, it’s strange to think about how things like rehab and therapy aren’t available to us anymore. Our sprites can heal physical wounds as long as they aren’t fatal but mental problems are basically untreatable, at least in the normal sense.”, said Bombshell.
“I feel bad for Mae. I’m pretty sure she’s got some mental stuff going on and now no one can properly treat it. I know she’s strong enough to live with it but it still hurts, knowing we can’t do anything.” Selmers and Bombshell had reached the top of the wall and they climbed onto the top, Bombshell sending the flower back down.

“Which way should we go?”, asked Selmers.

“If we go this way, we may be able to reach that window and get into the throne room or at least get a peek inside.”, suggested Bombshell. They began walking and Bombshell continued the previous conversation, “Y’know, now that I think about it, Angus and Lori might be able to fill that role. They have power over the mind and soul. Those would be extremely useful for therapy.”

“Yeah, I guess they would.”, replied Selmers. They reached a point as close to the window as they could. Bombshell scanned the area and decided she could get away with simply extending the wall out to make a bridge.

“Come on, before guards show up.”, urged Bombshell. Both of them ran across the bridge to the window before Bombshell returned the wall to its original state. Bombshell then pushed the window open enough for both of them to fit. It was a struggle, considering how small they were. Without warning, Selmers was dragged off by Bombshell, who took her and jumped off the windowsill, landing on the spear of one of the guards. Bombshell was struggling to keep both of them small enough not to be noticed while creating platforms for them not to slide off the spear. Soon enough, they were in the throne room, where a conversation began between the soldier and the black queen.

“My queen, I have a status report from the forces in Skaia. The stalemate has ended and we are pushing back the prospitans.”

“Finally, some progress in the war. That’s what I like to hear.” The queen was menacing. A smile made its way onto her lips as she received the news of their kingdom’s developing victory.

“There is, however, a problem. Recently, eight heroes have been reported working to defeat us in the war. Four of them reside here, while the other four are on Prospit. We killed one of two who tried to escape the planet. The other got away and the two others have yet to be spotted. Also, one of Prospit’s heroes has just been eliminated.” The smile on the queen’s face faded. The news that someone died shook Selmers and Bombshell. Who had died?

“I demand that the two remaining fugitives be killed on sight. We can figure out what to do about Prospit later. You are dismissed.”

“Yes, my queen. Consider it done.” The soldier left.

Selmers then asked, “How do we get down.”

“Shit, I didn’t think of that. I say I grow us back to normal size once we’re outside and we run into an alleyway, shrink back down and hide.” Selmers nodded. Once the guard was outside the front gate, Selmers and Bombshell grew back to full size and ran. Orders were yelled behind them to catch them as the sprinted to the nearest alleyway. Arrows began flying by as they jumped into the cover of an alley and shrunk back down. They hid under some trash on the ground as footsteps shook the ground beneath them. After a few minutes, the noise ceased and it was safe to come out of hiding. Bombshell escorted Selmers back to her house and then went back to hers. Both of them went to sleep to relay the information to everyone else.

SF: I’m back.
Bs: So am I.

SF: We just went to Derse and got some vital information from spying on the queen.

GT: How did you infiltrate the queen’s castle?

Bs: I just shrunk us down and used my space powers to build my way into the throne room.

GT: You realize you can fly as your dream self, right?

Bs: And why did you not think to tell us this?

GT: I thought you would just figure it out. Mae did.

Bs: Not everyone just tries to fly for no reason when we wake up as our dream-selves.

GT: Well, you know now.

SF: We heard someone died.

GT: Angus’ dream-self died protecting Bea from Eide. Eide left soon after and Angus woke up. Mae, Bea, and him are currently helping Gregg overcome his crippling self-hatred problem.

SF: Okay, that’s good to hear. We should warn Gregg, Lori, and Germ that the black queen may be coming after them soon. She already wants us dead but she said that she may be going after Prospit dreamers soon.

GT: That’s bad. Once everyone’s awake, we need to get everyone caught up with the current situation. Things are getting out of hand. The time we have until the reckoning just got a lot shorter.

Germ and Lori were waiting in Gregg’s house while he slept. They didn’t talk to each other much. When Gregg woke up, Germ was the first to greet him.

“Welcome back.”, said Germ.

“Hi, Gregg. How’d it go?”, asked Lori.

Gregg rubbed his eyes for a moment and when he was fully awake, he replied, “Eide has the ring. Angus’ dream-self is dead. We need to wake back up and regroup.” Germ and Lori simply nodded and left. Gregg found it hard to fall back asleep. So many thoughts were swirling around in his head. Eventually, the stress caught up with him and he fell asleep.

AD: I’m back. Mae and Bea should be back shortly. Gregg is going to bring Lori and Germ back from Prospit.

SF: Are you okay? Dying and coming back can’t be easy.

AD: It wasn’t exactly what I’d call a good time but sacrifices need to be made if we have any hope of beating this game.

MB: Hey guys!

Bs: Why, if it isn’t Ms. Borowski.

MB: Hi, Bombshell. How was Derse? Was it fun?
Bs: Yeah, it was. It’s too bad you weren’t there. You could have gone on a stealth mission with Selmers and me.

MB: What? You went on a stealth mission without me? I thought you were my friends.

Bs: We got to be really tiny and perform some pro espionage.

MB: You got to be tiny?! I’m so jealous right now!

AD: Look on the bright side. If you weren’t there when Eide attacked, we all would be dead right now.

MB: Yeah but I’m still mad I didn’t get to go on a cool stealth mission.

GT: Can we focus on planning our next move?

MB: But Gregg, Lori, and Germ are still asleep.

GT: We should still get started. First, we should go over everything that’s happened with Eide.

GL: Don’t you dare start this without me!

MB: Hi, Gregg! Are Lori and Germ coming?

GL: Yeah, they were on their way back home when I came back.

GW: Hello.

LM: Hi.

GT: Okay, great. Everyone’s here. Now about Eide. We know he has the white queen’s ring and that he plans to kill her.

SF: Do you think he’ll try to take the black queen’s ring, too?

GT: Chances are, yes, he will take the other ring.

GL: I’m confused as to why he didn’t kill all of us. He just left for no reason.

GT: I’m not sure. I think he made it clear by exiting the fight over the ring so early when he could have easily killed you, that he either wants something more from all of you or he couldn’t access his full power at that moment for some reason. I think it may have been the latter. Gregg was able to pierce the skin of someone with the power of an immortal god doubled with early game weapons.

MB: What if the black goat refused to give him his full power in that moment? Maybe he wasn’t worthy or something.

AD: If the power of the black goat was split up between the sprite and the two rings, then maybe, he needs both rings to gain all of its power.

GT: I don’t think that’s it. That didn’t happen in our session when Jade’s dog prototyped itself into her sprite.

AD: Why does it matter why he did it, anyway?
GT: You’re right. It probably doesn’t.

AD: Our goal should simply be to power through our gates as fast as possible.

GT: Also, I don’t think god tiering is optional anymore if you want to win this game so I guess I’ll explain it now. If you still have a dream-self, you can god tier by simply reaching the top of your echeladder, lying on your quest bed, and killing yourself. If one of your selves are dead, you need to go the center of your dream planet and die on the sacrificial slab with your aspect symbol on it, instead. If you can’t bring yourself to commit suicide, have someone else kill you. We can’t afford not to god tier with Eide in the picture.

SF: If anyone wants, I’ll kill you. A gun will make it quick and painless. Just message me when you need me.

GT: Now that everyone understands god tiering, you should all get back to your gates. We need to beat this game as fast as possible.

Everyone’s houses were built up to the second gate except for Bea’s, which was built up to the third gate. The big fight with Eide had given Mae, Bea, Gregg, and Angus a considerable boost to their echeladders. Bea and Gregg experienced the biggest boosts as Bea had once again used her blood powers to help Gregg get over his self-consciousness and Gregg had been freed from his self-hatred by his friends. This newfound freedom gave Gregg a sizable jump on his echeladder. The stealth mission gave a good boost to Selmers and Bombshell as well. Germ and Lori weren’t too far behind but it was certainly noticeable. Selmers was by far the highest out of everyone due to her exploits.

Germ was the first to enter his second gate. This took him to Gregg’s planet. He found the fans to be extremely annoying. He had prepared a headlight before coming here as well as some higher level bombs. He knew about the incident with Gregg earlier and he wanted to be prepared to face the mystery creature.

It did not take long for the creature to appear. After hearing growling behind him, Germ spun around to see a dog-like entity with the normal features of enemies in the session. It wasn’t just one though. Two more revealed themselves soon after the first. They began a blitz on Germ and Germ responded by flying up and throwing a grenade down. One of the dogs managed to grab his leg before he took off. The other two received the full force of the grenade and were killed. Germ could feel claws and teeth digging into his leg. His explosives were useless if he couldn’t get away from the enemy. He shook his leg frantically but the dog refused to budge. After a few seconds of shaking, Germ saw one of the fans. They were huge and it gave him an idea.

Germ flew full speed at the giant fan and came to a sudden stop in front of it, using the force to throw the dog off of his leg and into the fan blades. Blood and viscera flew everywhere, some of it managing to even reach Germ. He looked down at his leg to find that it had been mauled pretty badly. After landing, he found that he was limping. Despite this, he continued to walk because he knew that the jetpack would draw unwanted attention.

Bea was also on Gregg’s planet due to having already completed the second gate. She was exploring when she noticed a streak of light in the sky. It was Germ and something was biting his leg. Bea ran in the direction of the light, ignoring any enemies she saw along the way.

Germ hoped he would find the boss or whatever the game wanted to open the gate. This was the most annoying part. Not knowing what the objective of each gate is annoying. Luckily, his first gate ended with an easy boss fight against three ogres. As long as any boss he had to face couldn’t fly, he would be fine. Of course, Germ had jinxed himself. As soon as he had finished that thought,
a loud screech was heard along with the flapping of wings. He barely managed to dive to the side before the monster swooped down in an attempt to grab him. It was almost like a bird if it weren’t for the various other animals thrown in.

Germ began flying, hoping to put some distance between him and the creature. He soon realized the bird was faster than him. The bird was about to eat him when Bea cut it off, stabbing one of its eyes with her knife. A blood-curdling scream sounded throughout the planet, forcing Bea to cover her ears. Bea was dazed and didn’t see the beak about to close down on her until she was torn out of the way by Germ.

“Hi, Bea. How’ve you been?”, greeted Germ as he was performing evasive maneuvers, Bea in hand.

“Oh, I’m doing great. Almost getting eaten just so happens to be my favorite pastime.”, replied Bea sarcastically.

“Really? That seems like a strange hobby but who am I to judge?”

“I was being sarcastic.”

“I know.” Germ was flying towards one of the fans. He had an idea.

“Germ, are you sure flying into the giant spinning fan blades is a good idea?”, asked Bea.

“That’s not what I’m doing.

“Then what are you doing?”

“You’ll see.” Germ flew through the grating of the fan and made a sharp turn up. The creature, in an attempt to follow them, got its head stuck in the fan. It wasn’t in the blades but it was stuck.

“You should get away from here. You don’t want to be caught up in what happens next.”, suggested Germ. Knowing that Germ probably wasn’t joking around, Bea flew as far away as possible. Germ also flew a safe distance away before pulling out a mini-nuke launcher, created using a rocket launcher and a copy of Fallout 3. He fired his only mini-nuke at the bird, causing it to explode into many pieces and dropping a vast amount of Grist. A gate opened in front of Germ and he flew through. He was happy to be done and he needed to get his leg treated.

Bea only looked back to see the nuclear explosion. She was in awe. How could Germ be packing nuclear weaponry this early? Bea assumed that would be it for Germ. His gate had probably opened. Bea wasn’t sure what to do from this point. Part of her had hoped that killing the bird would open her gate, too.

After about fifteen minutes of nothing, Bea saw a faint glow in the distance. When she reached it, she saw it was a campfire. Next to it was a single lizard person. The person held their stomach in pain. They seemed to be starving. Suddenly, another wolf creature jumped out of the darkness and began mauling the lizard. Bea was quick to stab it in the throat. However, the lizard person was seriously injured. It wouldn’t kill them outright but Bea knew that if she left them like this, they wouldn’t be able to survive. Bea suddenly remembered the second part of her class description, one who heals with blood. She began to focus on the wound and the blood began to clot at a much faster rate than normal. The wound then proceeded to close and heal. The scabs left by the blood fell away to reveal scars. The wound was fully healed.

Bea began to help the person stand but was met with an attack from them. They brought out a survival knife and attempted to stab Bea.
“What are you doing?! I just saved you!”, yelled Bea. The lizard person was ravenous. Suddenly, Bea understood that it wanted her for food. Food must be scarce with all of the harsh monsters wandering about. Another thrust, this one met with a parry from Bea’s own knife. Bea swung and missed. The person dodged to the side and swung at Bea, grazing her side. The cut was long but not deep. Bea was determined not to die, especially not to another lizard person. Bea swapped to her Hell’s Razor and threw it. It knocked the knife out of their hand and allowed Bea to finish the fight by stabbing them with her Inferno Edge. There was no grist, only blood. The exit gate opened and Bea passed through.

Bombshell was now in the Land of clockwork and tapestries. She was amazed at the quality of the art depicting them and their quest. They seemed to have everything that had happened so far in their quest on display as well as some future predictions. Nothing too important, though. The most notable thing was a tapestry showing everyone in what Bombshell could only assume was their god tier costumes. She thought her costume was pretty sweet. Germ was getting screwed over. The bard costume was dumb and of course, there was the… She decided to stop thinking about it. Lori’s wasn’t great either. Did those even constitute as pants? They were so short that she wasn’t sure she could even call them shorts.

After examining everyone’s god tier costumes, Bombshell explored for a while. Killing things was easy and she felt so badass while swinging around her laser sword. Having a blade with no weight took some getting used to but she was getting the hang of it. There was one huge advantage to having a weightless blade. Bombshell could increase the size of the blade as much as she wanted and it would be just as easy to swing. Large groups could be downed in a single blow.

Bending the laws of reality was fun and all but it almost took most of the challenge out of the game. Bombshell knew she should be grateful that she had it easy in this death game but part of her had been excited to be in a real-life video game and looked forward to having a challenge.

Her wish was granted when a towering figure stood before her. It wielded a sword and shield. Bombshell swung her laser sword at it expecting it to cut through the sword or shield if it blocked. To her surprise, her blade was stopped dead in its tracks. The figure swung back and Bombshell avoided it by shrinking herself. She had forgotten to shrink her sword as well and it fell to the ground with a small thud. Growing back to full size, Bombshell attempted to grab her sword only to have it swatted away by the swordsman. Bombshell dodged a few swings and attempted to grab its sword. For an instant, her hand and the sword made contact. Suddenly, the sword grew drastically in size, becoming unwieldy. The swordsman was forced to drop its only weapon. Bombshell took out her starter great sword and began a relentless assault. Her sword and its shield clashed multiple times until Bombshell somehow managed to disarm the swordsman of its shield. That was the end of the line. Grist rained down as Bombshell made one final thrust with her sword.

The exit gate opened. After retrieving her laser sword, Bombshell walked through. She was satisfied with the challenge she was given with that boss. After returning to her computer to find that people were still in their gates, she decided to spar with her sprite. It was a good time and it gave Bombshell a few rungs on her echeladder.

Mae arrived in the land of frogs and mountains. She was happy to be away from her planet. She didn’t have to worry about her bad memories or her mental problems. For the moment, she could focus on something other than that. Overall, the planet was dull, save for some cool mountain tribes.

Mae’s powers as a thief of rage were pretty useful. The only downside was if she stole too much anger, Mae would risk having an episode and that had the potential to get her killed. Luckily, when she first learned of this the hard way, she was near her grandpa so she was able to get help. Mae
hated that her mental problems were holding her back. She hoped that when she god tiered, she would be able to handle stealing more liberal amounts of rage.

After some exploring and grinding, Mae came across an arena. Tribes came together and sent people in to fight to the death. Mae was jealous that her planet didn’t have lizard people death matches. As she approached, one of the tribe members ran up to her and seemed to be urging her to participate. The last match had just ended and Mae thought this would be a good way to blow off some steam so she agreed, walking into the circle.

The first few rounds were entirely one-sided. Mae had no trouble at all bashing in peoples’ skulls. During the next match, however, something went wrong. The opponents were the same yet different. Shapes. Why were they shapes? She was fighting people just moments ago. Mae turned to look at the stands. More shapes. Weren’t there people there? Were they even people to begin with? Turning back, she saw shapes approaching her at high speeds. Mae screamed out of fear and smashed all of the shapes with a long black shape in her hand. Red shapes flew and splattered on Mae. She wanted more. Soon, she was on top of one of the lizards and bashing their skull more than was necessary. More red shapes. Mae wanted the people back. The shapes had taken them away from her.

Soon, Mae had stormed out of the arena and into the stands. What followed was a massacre. Everyone began to flee. Dozens were killed. Why were the shapes running? Were they afraid? Shapes can’t have feelings. Soon, the area was void of life. Everyone had either escaped or died. After a few moments, Mae calmed down enough to realize what she had just done. She was covered in blood. Despair gripped her, dragging her down to the darkest depths of her psyche. Mae became despondent. The exit gate had opened. Why? Mae just killed dozens of innocent people and the game was rewarding her?

When Mae stepped through her gate, her parents were waiting for her. They immediately noticed the blood and tears and rushed to find out what happened.

“Mae, honey, what happened?!”, asked Candy.

Mae muttered, “All of those people are dead. I didn’t mean it. I don’t know what happened.”

“What do you mean? What people? Honey, you need to explain what happened.”, Candy pleaded.

“Kitten, we’re here for you. We only want to help you.”, added Stan.

“I killed so many of them. They were shapes and then, they weren’t. So much red. So much blood.”, Mae continued.

“She’s probably referring to the locals on Bombshell’s planet. She must have had one of her episodes in the middle of a large group. It was like the softball incident, except no one was there to stop her this time.”, explained Mae’s granddad. Mae flinched at the mention of the softball incident. This was just like that, wasn’t it?

“I killed so many innocent people. Why did the game give me a gate?”, wondered Mae.

“The point was most likely to have you experience an episode and learn from it. Now that you know how bad it can get if you let it get out of hand, you can be more prepared to handle it better next time. It’s not exactly a pleasant way to learn but we don’t have the luxury of time anymore so it has to be this way.”, replied Mae’s grandpa.

“Mae, we’re making tacos. Surprisingly, our stove still works. We can all eat together. You
deserve a small break.”, said Candy.

“That’d be nice.”, admitted Mae.

“Okay, what would you like on your taco?”, asked Candy.

“Everything!”, yelled Mae as she threw her arms into the air.

Selmers was barreling through Bea’s planet with ease. Even enemies that were supposed to be boss monsters died in one shot. Her Lunar Lance had such high damage. Despite how easy it was, Selmers was desperate to leave this planet as soon as possible. The prisons brought back unpleasant memories of her old life. The sorry state of the residents reminded her of her broken life before this game. In all honesty, SBURB was the best thing to ever happen to her. She had control over her life again.

While considering the current state of her life, Selmers came across an execution. Prisoners were lined up and waiting to be hanged. For some reason, Selmers decided to help them. She didn’t know why. They were prisoners. They had probably done something wrong to deserve this. Despite this, Selmers couldn’t stop herself. Something told her that they didn’t deserve it. The looks in their eyes weren't filled with evil or malice. The system that put them there was what was evil. She had seen it. People were thrown in jail simply for taking a break from their job.

Soon, Selmers was gunning down guards with her laser rifle. People ran around, screaming. After everyone had either left or died, she freed all of the prisoners and told them to run. They complied and ran off together. The exit gate opened but Selmers wasn’t finished yet. She took the spears of the guards and impaled their bodies with them before sticking them in the ground in a circle. She then drew into the ground between them, “DOWN WITH INJUSTICE”, in all caps. She wanted to set an example before she left. Guards arrived on the scene but Selmers was gone. All they were left with were the impaled corpses of many guards and a message in the ground.

Gregg hated Angus’ planet. He was freezing and it was impossible to navigate due to the mazes and blizzards. His jetpack allowed him to bypass the mazes but it didn’t make it any easier to see. There were flying creatures in the air that looked like birds. They were difficult to hit and they often flew in large flocks so they were a force to be reckoned with. Even a game like SBURB had a difficulty curve. Despite this, Gregg found that with a clear head, fighting became much easier. Without doubts in his mind, he had a much quicker reaction time and his technique improved significantly.

In a spur of the moment decision, Gregg flew up to one of the flocks and decapitated the leader of the group. The rest of the creatures scattered and initiated an assault from all sides. Gregg flawlessly dodged around in the air and even performed some acrobatics while he did so. He was feeling cocky. Dolphins coursed through him. No, that wasn’t the right word. He would ask Angus later. Right now, he needed to focus.

One by one, the bird-like monsters fell until only one was left. It began to fly away and Gregg followed. It was fast and it was hard for Gregg to keep up but he was determined to kill it. Eventually, Gregg was lead to a nest. Two large birds sat near the nest. The ones Gregg had been fighting were children. These were the mother and father.

Gregg began to fly away when one of them teleported in front of him. He forgot the monsters could teleport. After barely avoiding being eaten, Gregg went for the creature’s neck. As he was about to reach it, the other parent appeared and closed its beak on Gregg. Gregg could feel his torso being crushed. He managed to pull his arm inside and he stabbed its tongue. Cries were heard as the creature let him go. Gregg dodged another attempt to grab him and slit the throat of one of
the parents. It fell to the ground and the other was sent into a rage. The attacks were much quicker and random. A few strikes grazed Gregg but nothing too major. Soon enough, Gregg managed to slit the throat of the second parent as well. He returned to the nest to find it empty. The baby bird must have fled. Gregg sighed and his exit gate opened. He flew through.

Angus made quick work of Lori’s planet. The townsfolk were very friendly and they often seemed to want to help. Angus politely denied all of the requests to help him. He was glad to see that these people weren’t crazy murderers or something. He had heard about some of the people on the others’ planets. He was lucky enough not to have encountered any of the bad groups yet. It would happen eventually but at least it wasn’t now.

The boss of this world was a large insect-like monster. After about a minute of shooting and dodging, which was made easy due to his fraymotif, it died and Angus was ready to exit through his portal. Angus laughed at how easy this was. He had struck gold with his early-game fraymotif. Any one-on-one fight was easily controlled by Angus with his mind powers.

Lori was now on Mae’s planet and was horrified to find herself in the land of caves and shapes. She knew about Mae’s condition and was surprised that Mae hadn’t completely broken down. Her friends and she have been through so much. Lori admired them for being able to lead a somewhat normal life even after everything they’ve endured.

After exploring the surface for a while, Lori figured what she was looking for wasn’t there. She would be forced to enter the caves. Taking a deep breath, she entered the nearest cave. Fighting in the caves was difficult. The darkness forced Lori to rely on her other senses to guide her in combat. She was still a novice. Her fighting had improved but mistakes were still too often an occurrence. Luck had prevented plenty of untimely deaths but luck wouldn’t last forever.

The caves were so confusing. Lori constantly found herself emerging from a new cave entrance. What was she looking for? She assumed it would be a boss like last time or some moral challenge. Lori had passed by a few small groups of lizard people while exploring the caves. They all seemed to be drawn to something in the caves. Eventually, Lori decided to follow some of them. After about an hour of walking, Lori saw something. She was in an extremely large room with a large hole in the center. People were throwing themselves into the hole. This was just like the cult, except people willingly threw themselves in. What terrified Lori the most, was that she could feel something in the hole, almost like a pulse. An aura surrounded the hole that belonged to something powerful.

Lori ran as fast as she could away from the hole. Whatever was in the hole would kill her if she stayed for too long. What was that presence? Lori needed to know what she had just felt. She opened a private chat with John.

LM: John, I need to speak to you.

GT: What is it?

LM: Did you see what I just saw?

GT: No. I wasn’t watching you just now. Give me a second, I’ll take a look.

LM: I felt something in that hole. I’m so scared.

GT: Oh my god! I think that was Mae’s denizen.

LM: That was Mae’s Denizen?!
GT: The denizen is in that hole. You’re so lucky you didn’t wake it up. You would probably be dead with no hope of recovering your body.

LM: What’s Mae going to do if she finds out?

GT: She doesn’t need to know right now. She has some serious stuff she’s working through right now and if we told her, only bad things would come of it.

LM: I guess that would be best.

GT: Now, your gate is open. You should probably leave.

LM: But I didn’t even do anything.

GT: Running into a denizen is serious. The fact that you were able to run away shows that your heart is strong. The lizard people are just throwing themselves in. This traumatic experience will make you stronger. That’s the point of this game. You will all become better people by the end.


Lori put her phone away and walked through her gate. Her mother was there waiting for her.

“How was Mae’s planet?”, asked Lori’s mother.

“It was horrible but it got me thinking.”, started Lori.

“What is it?”

“I want you to train me. Teach me how to fight.”

“If that’s what you want, so be it. I won’t go easy on you just because you’re my daughter. I hope you understand that.”

“I wouldn’t want it any other way.”

“Alright, go talk to your friends and then we can begin your training.”

Lori nodded and ran to her laptop. Everyone was there, waiting for her. The second gates have been completed.
GT: We’re making good progress. Everyone has already completed two gates except for Bea who has finished three.

Bs: How difficult will the game get? Everything has been easy for me. I can’t speak for the rest of you but for a world-ending game, this is a bit too easy.

AD: Same here. Without Eide, I feel like this game would be way too easy. It’s easy now.

SF: It’s easy for me, too but I used exploits to boost my level so I don’t think I count.

LM: This game has NOT been easy. I’ve almost died way too many times.

MB: Me and Bea have already died so I’m not gonna try and say it’s easy because it’s not.

GT: For those of you who find the game easy, prepare to face bigger challenges in the future. The game will give better players harder challenges as the game continues while making sure it doesn’t overwhelm the weaker players.

AD: If the game is going to have a difficulty spike soon, we should probably work on making some better gear. We haven’t had upgrades in a while.

GT: That’s a good idea. We’re ahead of schedule so taking some time to gear up and train wouldn’t be a bad idea. We can start our next gates tomorrow. Take the rest of the day to rest and level up.

MB: How much time do we have until the reckoning?

GT: Don’t worry about that. Let me handle planning. Your focus should be on the game. Obviously, if I’m giving you the day to rest, we still have a decent amount of time.

GL: Guys, I have a great Idea! Let’s all hang out for a couple of hours!

MB: Yes! Let’s do that!

AD: Shouldn’t we focus on the game? This is a matter of life and death.

GL: C’mon, you heard John. We still have plenty of time.

BS: Honestly, I have to agree with Gregg. Some time together without any melodrama or life-threatening conflicts could do us all some good.

GT: That would be fine. Just make sure you save some time for crafting some new gear.

GL: Yeah! Let’s go, dudes!

MB: I’ll host. My parents are making tacos.

LM: Are you sure? Your planet didn’t seem very hospitable.

BS: I don’t think any of our planets could be considered hospitable.

MB: That settles it. Everyone get over to my house asap.

GL: AWOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!
Lori was the first to arrive. Mae had just finished telling her parents to make tacos for everyone when Lori knocked.

“Hey, Lori.”

“Hi, Mae.”

“Come in. I’m making tables and chairs for everyone so just sit on the couch for now.”

Lori sat and watched Mae as she rushed to set up the tables she had made in one long row. She carefully counted chairs. There needed to be ten. Eight players and two parents. Angus and Gregg arrived soon after Lori, followed by Germ and Bea. Bombshell and Selmers were the last ones to arrive. Mae finished setting up the tables and invited everyone to sit down. On one side of the table, Lori sat at the end next to Mae, followed by Bea, Selmers, and Bombshell. On the other side, Stan sat at the end next to Candy, followed by Gregg, Angus, and Germ. Mae’s Granddad floated at the end of the table.

Everyone was asked what they wanted on their tacos and soon, everyone was sitting down together to enjoy a nice, home-cooked meal. It was a pleasant break from the trauma and stress that came with SBURB.

Gregg looked at Candy and asked, “So, what’s it like being the only non-players in the session who haven’t died or been prototyped?”

“Bug, I thought we were doing this to get away from the game.”, said Angus.

“Yeah but I just wanted to know what it was like. You don’t really have to do anything. What do you do all day?”

“I wish I understood what was going on with all of this. All me and my husband can do is sit here and hope Mae doesn’t die. We like to talk to his dad a lot. He has to be near us constantly anyway because we’re not strong enough to defend ourselves. It’s funny how a dead man has more power than us.”, explained Candy.

“Trust me, it’s best that you don’t understand this game and what it entails. Ignorance is bliss. Always remember that. Don’t get yourself wrapped up in this more than you need to.”, Angus warned.

“I wish I could understand this game as much as you seem to.”, said Gregg.

“No, you don’t!””, Angus was raising his voice, “You don’t want to know what I know!”

“How much do you know?”, asked Mae.

“As the game has gone on, my powers as a mage of mind have grown. I know what it means to know so I can know everything. Knowing everything destroys your view of reality. It breaks what you thought you knew about the universe and forces you to start over. That’s not something you want to experience.”

“I’m sorry, is there anything I can do to help?”, asked Gregg.

“This isn’t something you should worry about. This is a burden I have to bear. Once I come into my own, the ability to understand what it is to know will be a great force in this session. I might
even be able to replace John as our planner and tactician.”

Everyone’s phones buzzed.

GT: I heard that!

Everyone laughed.

“Can we take the conversation away from the game? We can talk these things through later.”, requested Bea.

“What do you want to talk about?”, questioned Mae. There was a long stretch of silence.

“Why is thinking of something to talk about so hard?!”, exclaimed Gregg.

“If you think about it, everything we used to talk about is gone. Our old lives are over so there isn’t any point to talking about them. This game is our lives now. Our old hobbies and interests hold no significance anymore.”, Angus explained.

“We could talk about what to do with the new universe.”, Lori offered.

“That’s actually a good idea.”, Bea complimented.

“Well, we’re gonna need to repopulate… Oh shit.”, started Mae, “I just realized something. Gregg and Angus are gay and the only other guys in this session are my dad and Germ.” Everyone stopped eating suddenly as they came to this realization.

Gregg started laughing, “So, Germ, you got access to all of the ladies in this room. Who’s it gonna be?”

“I’ll do it with anyone, honestly.”, replied Germ.

“Oh my god, are we actually talking about sex while we’re eating dinner?”, remarked Bea.

“This is very important work we’re talking about, Bea.”, said Mae.

“If we need to, Gregg and I could offer to help reproduce. One of you could act as a surrogate for me and Gregg.”, Angus offered.

Gregg’s face lit up, “We could have children, cap’n! Wouldn’t that be great?!” He hugged Angus.

“Yeah, you two will be great parents!”, exclaimed Mae. “You better let them visit their aunt Mae all the time!”

“I’m pretty sure that’s not how being an aunt works. You have to be one of their sisters to be an Aunt.”, replied Bea.

“Me and Gregg are practically siblings.”, said Mae. Candy was visibly upset.

“Mom, are you okay? You seem upset.”, questioned Mae.

Candy responded, “It’s nothing. It’s just that you talking about being an aunt reminded me of Molly. She was a good person. She didn’t deserve to die like that.”

“I think we’ve all lost people thanks to this game. I lost my dad. We all had people back home that just weren’t in the right place at the right time.”, said Lori. Both her and Candy were crying. The
topic of deaths severely dampened the mood at the table.

Selmers put in her opinion on the topic, “Like Lori said, they were in the wrong place at the wrong
time. There was nothing we could do about it. We all die someday. At least it was quick and they
didn’t have to be here for this living hell.”

Suddenly, Mae blurted out, “It was my fault! I should have said something to you. I’m sure we
could have gotten her here if I had just asked. I was just being stupid and irresponsible. I forgot
about my own aunt at the end of the world. I’m sorry. I’ve already taken so much from you and
now Molly is gone because I forgot about her. You two deserve a better daughter than what I’ve
been.”

Mae’s parents were speechless but then Gregg stepped up, “Don’t you give me that shit! You were
the one who told me that we all make mistakes and despite how bad we may be, we still love each
other. Don’t tell me that didn’t mean anything! If I don’t get to wallow in self-pity over my
mistakes than you don’t get to, either! We need to keep moving forward! Letting our mistakes hold
us down only hurts the people around us, people that care about us in spite of our shortcomings. So
please, don’t put yourself in the hole that I was in. It’s not worth it.”

Bea added, “If you really feel bad about your mistakes, stop apologizing and work to fix them. The
worst thing you can do is let the failure mean nothing.”

Mae took a moment to process what her friends just told her and said, “You’re right. I always
acknowledged my failures but I never did anything about them. Once we win this game, I’ll get a
second chance. I’m lucky to have the opportunity for a second chance. I have to make the most of
it. I just wish I didn’t have these mental problems holding me back. I don’t feel safe anymore, even
now. I killed dozens of people on Bombshell’s planet because I had an episode. How can I fix
that?”

“Me and Selmers were actually talking about that while on Derse. Angus and Lori could probably
help with that once they god tier. They are the mind and heart players, after all. Also, if you’re a
rage player, chances are you’ll have a much better control of your emotions once you god tier. At
least, that’s what we could theorize. We may be wrong.”, Bombshell explained.

“If only I was a sylph of mind, that would be easily doable right now. Sadly, I’m not so we’ll still
need to go through therapy and all that.”, said Angus.

“As long as you’re not as bad as Dr. Hank, that’s fine.”, Mae agreed. That made everyone laugh
until they realized they were laughing at a dead man. An awkward silence followed which was
broken by Mae’s mom, “It’s good to know that my daughter has such great friends. She’s very
lucky to have all of you.”

Angus replied, “We’re glad to be her friends. She’s a good person, even if sometimes she can be a
little immature.”

“It’s good to hear that, especially from someone like you.”, said Stan.

“It’s the truth. We never got to have a lot of one on one time together but from what we did have, I
could tell she was a good person, just with a lot going on in her life.”

“Y’know, I used to work with your dad in the mining business. You must be sad he didn’t make it.”
Angus frowned. Nobody could see it but his eyes widened at the mention of his father.

“Is something wrong?”, asked Stan.
“No, it’s nothing.”

“It’s okay to be sad that your dad passed away. I had to go through that pain for years before this game started. I know what it’s like.”

Angus began to raise his voice, “I said it’s nothing.”

Mae intervened, “Dad, just drop the subject. Angus and his parents didn’t have the best relationship.”

“What happened? He seemed like a nice guy.”

“I should go.”, said Angus as he stood up.

“Cap’n, wait. Don’t go. It’s okay to talk about it.”, Gregg pleaded. Angus hesitated for a moment before sitting down. Everyone patiently waited for Angus to start.

After taking a deep breath, Angus began, “My parents used to abuse me as a child. My dad beat me regularly which would be bad enough on its own. My mom was worse. She would throw me in the pantry and slam the door so hard all of the food would fall onto me. She would sometimes leave me in there for days at a time. They both often refused to feed me, which is part of the reason why I like cooking. We stopped talking once I left but I’m still forced to visit my mother sometimes. My dad left years ago.”

Stan took a moment to process what Angus had just said. “I can’t believe he would do that. He didn’t seem like that kind of person.”

“You saw what he wanted you to see. No one who abuses their child will seem like the kind of person who abuses their child in public. That would be stupid.”, replied Angus.

“I’m sorry for pressing the subject. People like you shouldn’t be forced to relive that sort of pain.”, Stan apologized.

“No, it’s fine. You couldn’t have known.”, Angus assured.

“Alright, can we stop talking about depressing shit? We’re here to relax.”, requested Mae. Everyone agreed and they once again fantasized about their life in the new universe. After a couple of hours, everyone began saying their goodbyes and left to gear up for the next gate.

Gregg messaged Bea with a proposal.

GL: Hey Bea!

BS: What do you want?

GL: I was thinking. Since we both use knives, we should exchange codes for our weapons. That fiery rocket dagger seems really cool. I want to see what would happen if I combined it with my Witchdaggers. I’ll give the code for them so you could make some cool stuff, too.

BS: I guess that would be okay.

GL: Thanks!

They exchanged codes and went to see what they could make. Combining the Witchdaggers with the Inferno Edge yielded the Abyssal Incisor. The knife was a karambit which Gregg could tell by the curved shape of the blade. It had a small rocket on the pommel. There didn’t appear to be any
fire coming from the blade but as Gregg went to stab an imp with them, he saw that flames emerged from the wound. Gregg was pleased, to say the least. He loved it when he got a new knife. His love for knives could never be sated. Bea was pleased as well but more for the fact that the knife was simply better than her old one.

Mae also decided to message Bea.

MB: Bea, can I have the code for your lighter? A fire bat would be so cool.

BS: You, too? I guess you can have it. Just never start smoking.

MB: Wasn’t planning on it.

Mae combined Bea’s lighter with her Bat to create the Hellpyre. Black flames engulfed this weapon at all times. Mae immediately went to smash some things and it felt great. Normal objects would melt at its touch and imps were set on fire with ease. The black flame always stayed lit until whatever it was burning was nothing but ash. Mae needed to be cautious about using this around the house.

Angus decided that instead of making new weapons, it would be more beneficial to create armor. He was mad at himself for getting rid of the Demontower shirt. He did have a copy of sword people online. He opted to use that to combine with his clothes to create a nice suit of medieval armor. Angus felt like a total nerd but he was a nerd anyways so it didn’t really matter.

Lori trained with her mother for a while. She was getting better. The training did involve many injuries. Her mom made sure not to kill her but she was still willing to strike Lori with her machete. Lori needed experience in actual fights and sparing her some healable injuries would only hurt her in the long run. After they were done, Lori’s mother gave her a copy of her sprite machete. Alchemizing this with the chainchete created the Spirit Chain. When activated, the edge of the blade would light up with mystical energy.

Germ just created more bombs. He had asked everyone for the codes for anything cool they had. He compiled a list of various items and what bombs he could make with them. Selmers and Bombshell grinded for a little while instead of alchemizing. They felt they had good enough weapons for now.

Once everyone finished preparations for the next gate, they all went off to sleep. Mae, Bea, and Angus mentally prepared themselves for the furthest ring. The rest weren’t sure what to do once they were on their dream planets.

Bombshell awoke to the sound of windows breaking. She jumped up and saw a strange dersite with a knife in her room. He walked towards her, looking very eager to stab her. Bombshell opened a hole in her wall and jumped through, closing it as she went. She went to get Selmers. She wasn’t equipped to deal with an assassin on her own.

Selmers heard frantic knocking at her door and opened it to find Bombshell who forced her way in as soon as she opened the door.

“Woah, calm down. What’s going on?”, asked Selmers.

“The queen has already got someone trying to kill us. We need to get out of here. We need to find somewhere safe to stay.”

“Why don’t we just kill the assassin?”
“That won’t matter. They already know where I live. We can’t stay.”

“What can we go?”

Bombshell thought for a moment before saying, “What if we went to the center of Derse. We’d be hidden underground and next to our sacrificial slabs.”

“How will we get down there?”

“I’ll just create a hole to it with my space powers and close it once we’re down.” Bombshell began the process of opening a hole in the floor. It would take a while to get to the center.

The dersite then jumped through the window and went straight for Bombshell with his knife. A copy of Selmers appeared and punched him before disappearing.

“Selmers, you need to defend me while I make this hole.”, said Bombshell.

“I better not have a ton of time loops to complete after this.” To her dismay, the assassin was quick and many alternate versions of Selmers continued to appear to save Bombshell. Selmers cursed her future self for using her time powers so much. After a few minutes, the dersite was being worn down. Selmers seized an opportunity and stole his dagger. She stabbed him in the stomach. The assassin saw he was outmatched and fled. It was then that Selmers heard Bombshell.

“I made it!” it was barely audible. Selmers went and painstakingly completed all of the time loops and then flew down as the hole closed behind her.

The dersite slowly walked into one of the many alleyways in the city and slumped down against a wall. Then, Eide appeared.

“Were you seriously not able to kill two unarmed people! This job was NOT hard! Look at you now! You got stabbed!” Eide sighed heavily, “It’s fine. They’re in that hole now. They won’t notice anything I’m about to do.” Eide healed the assassin and told him, “I have another job for you if you’re interested. I can give you some of my power this time. You’ll probably need it.”

The assassin looked up with a curious look on his face.

“This time, you’re going after the white queen.”

Germ, Lori, and Gregg didn’t know what to do. They knew the white queen would be killed soon and there was nothing they could do about it. The castle was off limits to them due to their outburst. They mostly hung out and talked by the castle gate. Lori looked up at the clouds and saw something strange. It looked like her. There was a large stone slab on top of a mountain. Lori stepped on it and the vision ended.

“What was that?”, thought Lori out loud.

“Huh?”, said Gregg. He looked up at the clouds and saw Mae walking towards him, a blank expression on her face and tears streaming from her eyes. The vision ended before anything significant could happen. Gregg was extremely confused. Germ looked up but instead of the clouds catching his attention, he saw a black figure flying towards them.

“Hey, who’s that?” Said Germ nonchalantly. He pointed at the figure in the sky. Gregg and Lori snapped up to see them fly into the castle.

“Oh no.”, muttered Gregg to himself as he sprinted into the castle. Lori and Germ attempted to
follow him but they were cut off by the guards.

“Let us in!”, demanded Lori. The guards stood there, unmoving.

“I got this.”, said Germ as he casually walked towards them. As he grew near, the bodies of the guards became distorted and they began to fade. They screamed but it was too late. They were already in the process of being torn apart by the void.

“This may take a while.”, Germ warned. “Even people this weak are hard for the void to destroy entirely.” Lori ran in between the guards to chase after Gregg.

Gregg threw the throne room door open to find the queen dead along with several soldiers. At the center of the slaughter stood a dersite assassin. He spotted Gregg and teleported in front of Gregg. They stared into each other’s eyes. Gregg’s were filled with terror and despair which contrasted the ice-cold resolve of the queen’s assassin. The dersite held his hand to Gregg’s face, preparing to fire a blast at point blank range. Thoughts invaded Gregg’s mind that weren’t his.

Do the windy thing.

What the hell is that?

Do it!

What do you mean by the windy thing?!

Just do the windy thing!

I can’t do it if I don’t know what it is!

You have to do it or you’ll die! DO THE WINDY THING!!!

A split second before the assassin fired his blast, Gregg placed his hand on him and tore out something from his being. The dersite stumbled back. Gregg was surrounded by a small light blue aura. He felt different. He felt light and free. The assassin charged him with his knife but Gregg blew him back with a powerful gust of wind. The aura subsided.

Lori arrived in the throne room to find Gregg battling a dersite. She was horrified to see the queen was dead. The dersite seemed to have Eide’s powers but scaled back. Gregg seemed to systematically be beating him down. He was blowing the assassin away with gusts of wind which were supplied by stealing breath from the assassin.

Lori watched for about a minute before Germ arrived.

“Woah, since when did Gregg become an airbender?”, asked Germ.

“I think that’s just his aspect. His is breath, remember?”, answered Lori.

“That’s pretty cool.”

“Should we help him?”

“Nah. He’ll be fine. Your powers haven’t developed yet.”

“What about you? Couldn’t you just destroy him with the void?”

“That’s not how my powers work. I allow void to destroy. I don’t destroy with void. There’s a
difference. That guy has Eide’s powers, which means he has the black goat’s powers. The black goat has more control of the void than I do.”

“So, there’s really nothing we can do?”

“If you think you can fight a guy with a knife and eldritch magic with your fists, be my guest.” Lori knew Germ was right. Gregg seemed to be doing fine. His assailant wasn’t showing signs of growing tired but neither was Gregg.

Soon, more guards came. They thought it was a good idea to charge the dersite with no semblance of a plan, whatsoever.

Gregg yelled at them, “Don’t get in my way!” before blowing them back with some wind. The assassin took the opportunity to hit Gregg with an energy blast, knocking him back. Gregg was thrown to the ground and stunned for a moment. The dersite jumped at him with his knife ready to be thrust down into him. Then, Lori jumped in, tackling him midair. This gave Gregg enough time to get up before telling Lori to move. Lori did this and Gregg hit the assassin with a huge gust of wind. It was enough to send him through the wall. Gregg was left completely winded from that last attack. (Don’t worry. I hate myself for that pun, too.) Lori ran to the hole in the wall and saw the assassin flying away, unscathed.

Mae expected to dream in the furthest ring. Where she found herself was different yet familiar. She was in one of her old dreams. The starry sky and dark landscapes were all the same. Lamps lit up as she walked. There was one major difference, though. The dream was on a completely flat plain. Mae could see the outlines of the four musicians. They were so far away. Something else caught Mae’s eye as well. There were two shadowy figures in the distance. Mae was used to seeing the shadows of people in her dreams but these ones were different.

Mae ran towards the figures. They saw her and began running.

“WAIT! WHO ARE YOU!”, Mae yelled as she chased them. At the sound of Mae’s voice, the shadows stopped moving. Mae soon caught up to them. A lamp turned on, revealing the faces of the two figures.

“Mae?!”, exclaimed Bea.

“Bea?! Angus?! What are you two doing here?!”, asked Mae.

“We could ask the same of you.”, said Angus.

“These are my dreams. I’m pretty sure this is how the black goat sings to you.”

“What?! The black goat is singing to us?!” Bea was freaking out.

“Bea, calm down, it’s fine. We just have to find the four musicians and return to the start of the dream. They’re in those small towers in the distance. We can split up. I’ll get two of them.”, explained Mae.

“Alright, let’s go.” Angus started running. He didn’t have his asthma in the dream so he was pretty fast.

“This is fucking insane!”, yelled Bea.

“We’ll be fine. Just go.”, assured Mae. Both started running. It took them about ten minutes to reach all of them. They met in the center of all of them.
“What now?” asked Angus.

“We need to stand in front of those four lights. I will warn you, your bodies should begin breaking down. You’re not dying. That’s just you exiting the dream.”

“Another question, is this what the singing is supposed to sound like? It’s just noise.”, Angus questioned.

“It’s been like that lately. It used to be actual good music but now it’s just… this. Maybe it’s because the black goat isn’t being fed.”

“Can we just end the dream already?”, requested Bea. Mae nodded and stood in front of the lights. The shadowy figure of a goat towered over them, just like last time but something was wrong. Their bodies stayed.

“Mae, I thought you said we would leave. Why aren’t we waking up?!”, asked Bea.

“This isn’t how it’s supposed to happen. We need to run, NOW!” Everyone started running and the goat began chasing them. They were fast but the goat was faster.

“It’s gaining on us.”, Angus pointed out.

“Why can’t I have my dream bat right now?”, Mae said to herself. Suddenly, as if the dream could hear her, a fluorescent blue bat appeared in her hand. She stopped and turned to face the goat.

“What are you doing?! You’re going to get yourself killed!”, Bea yelled.

“I’ll be fine. You need to run.”

“We’re not leaving you here!”

Mae jumped up, slamming her bat into the goat’s face. It reeled back and sent streams of darkness at her. Mae blocked them with her bat. She struggled against the force of the darkness. Suddenly, the darkness engulfed the bat. It began to move up Mae’s arm. She tried pulling away but it wasn’t working. Then, Bea jumped in, slicing through the darkness with a dagger. Blue beams of light flew above Mae. Angus had a pair of dream wands. The goat was being pushed back. The singing grew progressively louder as all three of them assaulted the goat. Mae was the one to strike the finishing blow. In an instant, the song ended and they all woke up.

What felt like about fifteen minutes in the dream ended up being eight hours in real time. They were the first ones awake but everyone else followed soon after.

GT: Looks like everyone’s up. We can get started on getting to the third gates now.

GL: Wait! I have some questions.

Bs: So do I.

GT: Right, I suppose I should tell you about Jack. If you can, you should kill him as soon as possible. It seems like he’s working with Eide.

GL: Is that the name of the assassin?

GT: Yes, his name is Jack.

Bs: You saw him, too?
GT: He appeared on Prospit a few hours after you two hid in the center of Derse. He had some of Eide’s power and he killed the white queen.

MB: Ugh, I wish I wasn’t dead so I could help you guys.

GT: For the most part, everyone came out unscathed. Gregg even learned how to do the windy thing!

MB: The what?

GL: I have cool wind powers now!

GW: He’s basically an airbender.

GL: There’s more to it than that. Like John said earlier, breath is both literal wind as well as one’s sense of freedom and direction. I’m beginning to understand that more now. The more I release myself from my self-imposed shackles, the more power I’ll have over my aspect.

GT: Exactly! I was a wind player as well. You’re on the right track.

BS: It’s great that Gregg can ‘do the windy thing’, but we should really get started on our next gates.

MB: It’s good we got Bea over here as our designated mom friend.

GT: I guess I’ll let you all go. Just keep going like you’ve been doing.

Everyone took this as their sign to start building. This was the most boring part of SBURB. Building up to a gate took forever. It became worse if your client player didn’t have enough grist and you had to wait for them to grind. Selmers alleviated the problem somewhat but a player could only hold so much grist based on their level and sometimes, it wasn’t enough.

Soon enough, everyone’s houses had been properly built up to the third gate. Everyone began entering but Bea received a private message from John before she walked through.

GT: Bea, could you do something for me?

BS: What is it?

GT: Everyone else is on their third gate and you’re on your fourth. I want you to not do the fourth gate right now. While everyone else is gone, you should go after Jack.

BS: Are you sure? Where would I even find him?

GT: I’d start at Derse. The white queen is dead. If Eide’s controlling him, he’s probably working with him on Derse.

BS: Are you sure I can beat him. I died to a couple of lizard people.

GT: You’ve improved since then. Sure, your powers aren’t exactly great in a one-on-one fight, but at least you’ll have a weapon. I’m sure you’ll be fine.

BS: Alright, I’ll do it. The airship I had was destroyed so I’ll have to fly there myself. It’ll probably take a while. How will I sneak in once I’m there?

GT: That is a problem, isn’t it?
BS: Were you about to send me in there with no plan of how to infiltrate Derse?!

GT: Calm down. You could always try to alchemize an invisibility cloak or something.

BS: How would I do that?

GT: Just start combining things that might create something like that until you find a solution.

Bea found a jacket which was the closest thing she had to a cloak and began pondering what would make it turn her invisible. She couldn’t think of anything but she thought of another idea. She found she could actually captchalogue the airship. Alchemizing a new one cost almost all of her Grist.

GT: That works, too. I forgot you can basically captchalogue anything in this game. I never felt the need to carry around giant buildings and stuff in my session.

BS: I guess I’ll get going now.

GT: Good luck.

And so, Bea left to take on Jack and stop him before he became too much of a problem.
Chapter 7

It had taken Bea about two hours to reach Derse. Luckily, the guards didn’t notice she was the one riding in. They did, however, notice when she avoided landing in the airship hangar. She could see guards being sent to investigate as she flew. This was a horrible idea. Why did she agree to this? Bea ejected herself from the ship after putting it on autopilot and slowed her landing with her jetpack. The hope was that the soldiers would continue following the ship and not notice her. To her surprise, she saw them still running after the ship as she hid in an alleyway.

BS: I’m here. Where Should I start looking?

GT: Start your search around the castle. Eide will most likely try to get his hands on the second ring.

BS: What if I run into Eide and he kills me?

GT: My advice is to not run into him.

BS: If he and Jack are working together, how am I supposed to do that?

GT: Just follow your instincts.

BS: Oh my god, our leader is a dumbass.

GT: I’m sorry. I wish I could monitor them but I can’t. I can only monitor the players.

BS: If I die, it’s your fault.

GT: Okay.

Bea sighed as she closed her phone. She stealthily made her way to the castle of Derse. Security was unbelievably high. She decided to perform a stakeout. If Eide's next target was the black queen, he would be sending Jack in to infiltrate. As she suspected, Jack walked up to the front gate and the guards let him in. Bea wasn’t sure what to do. There was no way for her alone to sneak into the castle. She decided to wait until Jack inevitably came back out so she could ambush him with no one looking.

Jack was welcomed back into the castle. They all had no idea what was about to go down. He was taken to the throne room. As soon as he entered, he charged the queen. Everyone in the room was shocked. The black queen clashed with Jack while the guards threw spears at him. They failed to hit Jack. He and the queen were too fast. Where did Jack get this power from?

People from outside began rushing in, leaving the castle unguarded. Bea seized the opportunity and ran in. The panic over the attack on the queen concealed her entrance. She reached the throne room and what she saw made her regret coming. Jack was fighting with the queen. Bea thought he may have had some plan to steal the ring or something before killing her but he was able to hold his own with no plan against an endgame boss.

GT: You need to run. Hurry while everyone is focused on the queen’s safety.

Bea took John’s advice and ran. Unfortunately, Eide was standing in the doorway. He stared down at her with cold hatred. Bea was terrified. What had she just gotten herself into?
“Don’t worry. As much as I want to kill you, I can’t. The black goat has bigger plans for all of you.”, said Eide.

“What?” Bea was confused. Bigger plans? What did that mean? Her thoughts were cut off when the queen let out a scream. She had been mortally wounded. Jack stabbed her in the chest. She fell and Jack leaned over to take the ring.

“Yes, Jack! Now, for the last part of our agreement! Give me the ring and you get to live when I take over! You will rule beside me! The entire multiverse will be under our control!”, exclaimed Eide.

Jack looked at Eide, his cold expression unchanging. He didn’t trust Eide. He only used him to get where he was now. Without a second thought, he put on the ring. The transformation was a shock to Jack. Eide already had the black goat in him so him getting the ring only gave him a power increase but to Jack, this was all new. He writhed on the ground as his new form and powers manifested. Once he made it through the pain, Jack looked to Eide. If he could get the second ring, he could be ruler of the multiverse.

*Interesting. He was able to adapt to my presence very quickly. This Jack may be a better vessel for my powers than even you, Eide.*

“No! My lord, I’ve been more loyal to you than anyone else! I am the only fitting vessel for one such as yourself! I only want what you want!”

*Then prove it. He looks like he wants the second ring just as much as you do. Whichever one of you obtains both rings first is most worthy of my power. If neither of you succeeds by the time Mae and her friends win the game, I will consume both of you instead. Your suffering will be unending. Do you understand?*

Eide was furious. He wasn’t about to let a lowly assassin take the black goat from him. What followed was a clash of gods. Every impact was felt throughout Derse. Soon, the castle crumbled. Earthquakes ravaged the nearby area. Bea ran, large chunks of debris falling around her. She saw the front gate. A large boulder blocked the exit. She flew up with her jetpack. As she made it over the gate, a piece of the castle smashed into her jetpack, causing it to break. Bea landed hard and broke a few ribs.

Bea clutched her chest and began limping in the direction of her ship. “Please, god, let it still be there.”, she said to herself as she walked. Buildings crumbled behind her. Bea wondered how this would affect the war. Both queens were dead and the civilizations were on their way to falling. To Bea’s delight, her ship was still here. She got in it and started it.

Bea flew away from the planet. She had no idea what just happened. Eide was talking to something. He seemed scared of not being a ‘vessel’. Did the black goat threaten to leave him? Bea felt like an idiot for going in the first place. By the time she got back, everyone would probably be done with their gates. At least she was ahead to begin with.

The gates had all been mostly the same as the previous ones. Explore world, fight boss and/or help lizard people. Everyone was done in a few hours, just in time for Bea to return.

BS: Is everyone here?

GT: Yes. We need to tell everyone what happened.

MB: What’s he talking about?
BS: Okay, so the black queen is dead and Jack has her ring. Him and Eide are fighting for control of both rings.

MB: That’s awesome! They’ll keep each other busy while we finish our gates.

BS: That’s true but once one of them inevitably wins, we’re screwed. Their fight even with only one ring each was destroying the city. The castle is completely gone. If one of them had both rings, they could wipe our entire group easily, at least this early in the game.

AD: Would there be any way to steal one of the rings? If we could get our hands on one, we would stand much more of a chance.

BS: If we interfere we would be killed instantly. Although…

MB: Ooooh, Bea’s got a plan! Are we about to go kick some eldritch ass?

BS: Eide did say something about having bigger plans for us. As of recently, he isn’t allowed to kill any of us.

Bs: If that’s the case, why would he send Jack to assassinate our dream selves?

GT: My guess would be that he wants everyone’s dream selves to be dead so he can act on Prospit and Derse without us being aware of it.

BS: What if we used that? Mae, Angus, and I could go to confront them and Eide would do everything in his power to keep us alive… hopefully.

GL: Are you sure he cares that much? What if this ends up being a suicide mission. They can’t come back if we die. Maybe we should send everyone who’s dream selves are still alive in their dream bodies.

AD: Gregg, I am not letting you send yourself on a suicide mission.

GL: Yes, but if we die in our dream selves, we’ll just wake up.

GT: Both plans are dumb. We can’t risk sending people without extra lives in based on something someone as unstable as Eide said and getting everyone’s dream selves killed for no reason is idiotic.

GL: Even if it’s a suicide mission, we have to try. If one of them gets both rings, our session is screwed.

GT: I may have a solution. Selmers, how close are you to god-tiering?

SF: I’m about 85% of the way there.

MB: Wow, how did you get so far?

SF: Time shenanigans.

MB: Can I get more details?

SF: You shouldn’t think too deeply about how time works. It’ll only cause problems.

GT: As a maid of time, you can create time. Do you understand what that means?
SF: I think so? I’ve only been using time loops so far. I didn’t want to start messing with time in any other ways. Time is extremely unstable if wrongly used.

GT: I need you to speedrun your next gate. Fly up and slow down time for everything but yourself. It won’t be drastic since you haven’t god tiered but we need all of the time we can get. Grind until you reach the top of your echeladder and kill yourself on your quest bed.

SF: Are you sure this is okay?

GT: Yes, it’s fine. You can’t be afraid to abuse your powers.

SF: Alright, I’ll go as fast as I can.

Selmers pushed the time slow effect to her limit. She struggled to reach a point where she was moving at double speed relative to everything else. She half expected the timeline to start falling apart. Her alignment in the timeline was being forced out of place. Time for Selmers was moving twice as fast as the rest of the universe. Nothing happened, however. Selmers understood now. She could do this because she created the time needed to fill in the gap she was making between herself and the timeline. That was her power. Selmers rushed to her fourth gate on a jetpack.

MB: What can the rest of us do?

GT: What’s everyone else’s progress on their echeladder. Give me an estimate.

MB: 55%

GL: 65%

AD: 70%

GW: 60%

LM: 40%

BS: 70%

Bs: 65%

GT: Alright, everyone seems to be making decent progress.

MB: Why are so many people further than me? This is so unfair.

GL: Maybe we’re just better than you, dude.

MB: Shut up!

AD: If you think about it, it makes sense. Those of us that use our powers often and/or have breakthroughs in our character based on our aspect are further ahead. Selmers used her powers more than any of us so that’s why she’s further ahead. The fact that she controls time also helped.

MB: So, I’m behind because I can’t effectively use my powers without having a mental breakdown?

AD: That’s probably it. This game seems to act as a way to test our character and fix our shortcomings. Once you learn to live at peace with your mental problems, you’ll probably experience a big boost on your echeladder.
MB: How do I do that? It just seems like no matter how hard I try, it keeps coming back.

AD: That’s something I can’t say for sure. The only advice I can give you is to ask yourself, are you trying to live with it or are you trying to get rid of it? I hate to tell you but what you’re going through isn’t something that can be completely fixed. There will always be times where it comes back and no amount of help can change that. All you can do is allow a healthy release of those pent-up problems. We’re all here for you if you need to let anything out.

MB: Thanks, big guy. I need some time to think about all of this.

AD: That’s perfectly normal. You know, your mental problems and my worldview might be similar. Whenever you have an episode, everything is just shapes. That notion that we’re all just things in the universe is what I based most of my beliefs on. I know it’s not really the same but I thought it might help.

MB: Yeah, I don’t think it’s the same but thanks for trying.

LM: Just be glad you aren’t as bad as me.

GT: You’re the page. It makes sense that you’d be going this slow. That’s just what being a page is like.

GW: Weren’t we talking about a plan?

GT: Right, we need to focus. We don’t have time to do another gate, so I don’t think anyone else is god-tiering now. Selmers should be all we need, though. While Selmers is gone, everyone should go do sidequests on their planets. Get as much experience as you can. When Selmers returns, I’ll ask her to abuse her time powers until she can buy everyone’s fraymotifs with the large amount of boondollars she has. Try to find the shop that sells them while your grinding. We need to save as much time as possible.

MB: Time players are so overpowered. I wish I could break the game like that.

GT: Time players are overpowered but they have a lot of responsibility. Time is fragile and one mistake could break the timeline. I’m surprised we haven’t had to break Selmers out of a loop of dead Selmers’.

MB: That can happen?

GT: That’s what would happen if a time loop went wrong. I can’t claim to fully understand it but it results in multiple corpses piling up until it’s somehow broken.

BS: We should be grinding right now, not talking about time loops dying or whatever.

GT: Right, everyone leave, now!

Everyone flew across their planets looking for side quests. They were all just typical rpg side quests. Kill/collect x amount of y, bring object a to person b. Stuff like that. They rewarded decent money and exp. Nothing drastic but enough to matter. After about an hour and a half John told everyone to come back.

MB: Wow, that was fast.

SF: Everything moving at half speed to me certainly helped.
GT: Selmers is on her way to her quest bed. She should be god tiered soon.

SF: So, you want me to buy everyone’s fraymotifs for them?

GT: Yes, we need everything we can get before this fight and now that you’ll be god tier, you’ll have enough starting money for getting enough money for everyone to be doable in a decent amount of time. The god-level time powers will also help.

SF: I’m here. Do I just die on the bed?

GT: Yes, that’s exactly what you need to do. You’ll wake up on Skaia but you can just fly back to grab your stuff.

SF: This is kind of overwhelming. Like, I know I’ll come back but I still feel uncomfortable with killing myself.

GT: You’ll be fine, just get it over with.

Selmers pointed her gun at her head. She was scared. She knew she shouldn’t be but she was still shaking. Dying was still dying. After letting out a shaky sigh, she pulled the trigger. A few moments passed before both of her bodies were dead and they began floating, surrounded by a bright light. One of the eight pillars of Skaia glowed brightly in the black sky. Everyone looked up, awestruck at its beauty.

Selmers woke up on Skaia. She had red robes and a hood and the image of a gear was on her chest, the symbol of time. Her understanding of time and her power over it grew exponentially. She threw both of her hands out, and time came to a halt all throughout the session. Smirking, Selmers flew back to her planet at full speed. It was much faster than any jetpack could ever dream of.

When she got back to her planet, her body was gone but her loot was still there along with a bloodstain where her head was. The process of duplicating trillions of boondollars was quick, at least relative to the normal timeline. After about fifteen minutes real time, everyone had all of their fraymotifs. The timeline unfroze and no one even knew what happened. They were all simply flooded with the knowledge of how to perform all of their fraymotifs.

GT: I think we’re ready. Bea still has an airship from Derse. She can take you there.

Everyone rushed to Bea’s house and got in the airship. They had to build extra seats for everyone but once that was done, they were on their way. Selmers slowed time around the ship. Everyone talked about what they would do.

GT: Once you get to Derse, Selmers will time stop Eide and Jack. Then, you can grab both rings.

“Alright, some good ol’ fashion crimes! Let’s do this!” exclaimed Gregg.

“Gregg and I should steal the rings. We’re the rogue and thief classes, after all.”, suggested Mae.

“If that’s what you want, be my guest.”, replied Bea. “It’s not like they’ll be able to do anything.”

“Crimes?”, asked Gregg.

“Crimes.”, Mae responded. They both laughed.

Soon enough, Derse was in view. The destruction was visible throughout a large portion of the planet.
“Holy shit! My body is still in there!”, said Bombshell.

“You’re the last of the Derse dream bodies.”, stated Selmers.

“There they are!”, yelled Mae. She pointed at flashes of light in the distance past a sea of asteroids. Beams and explosions saturated the dark sky with bright lights. Punches, kicks, the impact of ethereal weapons, all could be felt even miles away.

As they approached, Bea struggled to evade the asteroids that stood between them and the fight. Selmers signaled for Mae and Gregg to follow her to steal the rings. She focused on Eide and Jack. They froze but Selmers was clearly struggling.

“Hurry.”, Selmers managed to say as Eide and Jack struggled against her time powers. Mae flew up to Jack and Gregg flew to Eide. They stole the rings simultaneously. Eide and Jack lost their powers.

“Alright, dude! We got the rings! Let’s go!”, exclaimed Gregg. He flew away but Mae stayed. “Dude, we can leave now. What are you doing. We can’t keep everyone waiting.”

“Yeah, just give me a minute. I have something I need to do.” Mae’s voice was grim. She lifted the ring and prepared to put it on her finger.

“Mae, stop! Don’t do it!”

“I need to do this. We can kill Eide. It’s the least he deserves for what he did to Casey.”

“I know what happened to Casey was horrible. I want him dead, too but we don’t know what that ring will do to you.”

“I’m willing to take that chance.” Mae slipped the ring onto her hand. Pain coursed through her. She screamed in agony as the black goat consumed her. After about a minute, the screaming subsided. Mae looked up. Her eyes were different. They were nightmare eyes. They were evil. Mae formed a bat of darkness. She teleported to Selmers and smashed it into her head. Selmers was knocked unconscious. Eide and Jack were freed from Selmers’ time stop. Jack rushed Mae and Mae casually swung her bat behind her without looking. It hit square on Jack’s head, knocking him out.

Gregg took Selmers and rushed back to the ship. Everyone had gotten out to help. Gregg placed Selmers inside.

“Fuck, this can’t be happening!”, Gregg muttered to himself. Everyone was attempting to subdue Mae.

“We can’t hold back just because she’s our friend.”, said Angus.

“Are you crazy?! She doesn’t have a dream self to fall back on!”, argued Bea.

Angus replied, “She has the power of the ring. We need to weaken her if we’re going to get it off.”

Bea sighed, _Please don’t die, Maeday._

To everyone’s surprise, Lori was the first to attack Mae. Her fighting had gotten much better since they started _SBRUB_. Mae and her clashed multiple times. Gregg and Bombshell jumped in to help while Angus provided support from the back. Bea healed any minor injuries as they came. Germ wasn’t sure what to do. His bombs were useless with three people in close quarters combat with the
enemy. He saw Eide trying to leave and he chased after him. They Headed out to the furthest ring.

No one could hit Mae. She was too fast. She managed to block and dodge the efforts of five people effortlessly.

“We have fraymotifs. Use them!”, commanded Angus. Lori and Bea started by casting Anima Ensemble, bolstering everyone’s morale and making it easier to work together. Gregg and Angus used Paramour Phrase. Angus combined his magic with Gregg’s wind and created an explosion of teal energy in Mae’s vicinity. Mae was blown back and Bombshell was ready to intercept her. She swung her laser sword and activated Staccato Expanse, causing her blade to increase drastically in size instantly for the swing before returning to normal immediately after. There was a large gash in Mae.

“Stop! You’re going to kill her!”, yelled Bea. Laughs were heard from Mae as her wounds began to close up.

“It’s going to take a lot more than that to kill me.” Mae’s voice wasn’t hers. It was much deeper and distorted. “Let’s play some mind games, shall we?” Mae snapped her fingers and Bea found herself somewhere else. She was standing in front of a grave. She noticed she was crying. Why was she crying? Reading the inscription on the grave made it clear why. This was her mother’s grave.

What? Why am I here? Why is mom dead again?

Everyone looked over to see Bea holding her head in her hands, crying.

“No, please! Don’t take her away from me again! I just got her back, please!” Bea was screaming. No one knew what was going on. They were given no time to react before the snapping of fingers was heard again. This time, the target was Gregg.

Gregg was in standing next to Bea’s car. It had a flat tire. Angus seemed angry and they were both crying.

“I don’t think this is working anymore.”, said Angus.

“What? Are you breaking up with me?”, asked Gregg.

“…Yeah.”, replied Angus.

Gregg broke down on the spot next to Bea.

“Please don’t leave me! I’m nothing without you! I’m sorry I wasn’t good enough! I’ll be better, I swear, please!”

“Oh, this is fun, watching you suffer.”, Mae was laughing maniacally.

“Angus, let’s do it!”, yelled Lori. Angus nodded and they used Tonal Resolve. Bea and Gregg’s minds and souls began to stabilize and they calmed down.

Once Bea calmed down, she was sent into a rage. “Don’t you fucking dare bring my mother into this!” She cut deep into Mae and activated Bloody Crescendo, causing blood to explode out of the wound. Bea continued to force blood out to stop the wound from closing. After a few seconds, Mae stopped caring and swung at Bea. Gregg stepped in front of her and parried the incoming blow with his left dagger, striking with the right. Mae grabbed his hand and squeezed. Gregg winced as his hand was slowly being broken. Mae raised her bat with her free hand and swung. The first strike landed on Gregg’s face but the second was blocked by Gregg.
Angus activated Cerebral Cadenza and saw that he could force Mae to drop the bat by hitting that hand. He did this and Mae reacted accordingly. Angus used it again but he couldn’t see a way to get her to let go of Gregg. What he did see was horrible. In every possible outcome, Gregg was killed. Mae either ripped out Gregg’s heart with her right hand or blasting a hole in his chest with the left. He wasn’t fast enough to stop both. Angus panicked. He couldn’t let Gregg die but there was no way out.

Angus opted to at least try. He blasted the right hand with magic but as he had already seen, Mae prepared an energy blast in her left. She threw Gregg and blasted a hole into his chest. Angus cried out even though he knew this would happen. That was when Selmers woke up. She saw Gregg die and yelled to Angus, “Angus, our fraymotif!”

Temporal Reprise was a fraymotif in which Angus searched through the different timelines and found an ideal scenario for that moment, one in which Gregg hadn’t died. Selmers than pulled them into that timeline and Angus placed their minds into the bodies of that timeline. This level of time manipulation was extremely draining and somewhat dangerous but to Angus it was worth it to save Gregg. He would risk anything for him.

Selmers held Mae with her time stop and everyone got a chance to wail on Mae. The wounds kept healing. Bea flew up to Mae to steal the ring. She reached her hand out to touch the ring.

Germ followed Eide for a while until Eide realized he was being followed.

“What do you want? If you want a fight I’ll happily oblige.”, challenged Eide.

“Okay.” Germ brought out a variety of grenades and explosives. He started by systematically placing proximity mine all around them. He threw a smoke bomb next to him and managed to get behind Eide before sticking him with c4. He then kicked Eide to the first proximity mine. He had set it up exactly so that the force of each mine would send Eide flying to the next. Eide was scared. He was at his weakest right now and Germ wasn’t someone to trifle with.

“Fine. If I can’t beat you myself, I’ll just get the horrorterrors to kill you for me.”

“What horrorterrors?”

Eide looked behind him. They were all hiding. Why were they hiding? Germ was just some bird.

Germ smirked, “I guess you didn’t account for the fact that I’m a void player. That’s why they’re scared of me.”

Eide suddenly realized how bad this was. They were fighting in the furthest ring and Germ was a void player. His power here could be enough to kill him even in his sprite form. Eide knew he had to get away so he flew away from the furthest ring. He needed to get the ring back. He had to fix everything.

Eide flew back to the original scene of the fight to find Selmers awake and Bea about to take the ring back from Mae. He wouldn’t let this happen. He needed that ring. He flew as fast as he could and punched Bea before she could take the ring. He took the ring and put it on. Mae was left unconscious from the stress the ring had put on her body.

Selmers held Eide down with her time stop and told everyone to escape. Gregg grabbed Mae and took her to the airship with everyone else.

“Go. I’ll meet back with you once your all home.”, Selmers demanded. Everyone left, leaving to deal with Eide. As everyone left, Eide broke out of the time stop just like Mae.
Mae woke up and saw Selmers staying behind.

“No! What are you doing?! We can’t leave her!” she screamed. It took the combined efforts of Gregg, Bea, and Angus to hold her down.

“Mae, calm down. She has a plan. She’ll be fine.”, Angus assured.

“But if she dies like this, we can’t bring her back! She’s being too selfless!”

“We can’t do anything for her. We’re not strong enough. None of us are god tier except her. We can trust her to be able to handle this. We can’t have Eide chasing us for the second ring.”, Angus explained.

Mae began to sob, “I’m just so scared. I’m sorry about ruining everything like I always do.”

“Dude, you couldn’t have known that would be what the ring does to you. It was brave of you to risk that so we could have a better hope of winning the session.”, said Gregg. Angus in his mind thought what Mae did was reckless but he kept his mouth shut. He knew saying that would only make things worse.

While Mae was calming down, Jack appeared on the ship.

“How the hell is he here?!”, yelled Bea. Jack was clearly weak but that wasn’t going to stop him from trying to take his ring back. He lunged at Gregg as best he could but Gregg caught him with his knife and made a large cut. Jack stumbled back, falling to the ground and clutching the wound.

“Bea, save him and restrain him. I have an idea.”, Angus requested. Bea reluctantly agreed, healing him while Gregg tied him up.

“What’s next cap’n?”, asked Gregg playfully.

Angus revealed his plan, “Bea, I’m going to open his mind for you. I want you to create a familial bond between him and us. We’ve seen him control the ring’s power. If he’s on our side, he’ll be of great use to us in the long run.”

“Are you sure we want to risk that?”, questioned Bea.

“Yes. It’ll work, I know it.”

Bea nodded and began her work. Gregg also pitched in by giving Jack some breath. He was free to choose which helped him to accept their friendship faster. Soon, he was willing to work with them. He wasn’t exactly overjoyed to be with them but he was okay with helping them.

“I’ve done all I can. The rest will have to be built through our interactions with him. I doubt he’s ready to fight Eide for us yet.”, said Bea.

“That’s fine. This’ll help us in the long run.”, replied Angus.

Selmers was hard at work trying to fight Eide. She was doing well but Eide was immortal in his sprite form. She knew she would get worn down eventually and that this would count as a heroic death. Selmers waited for her future self to initiate the plan. Once her future-self came, she grabbed Eide and returned to the future. This would give her group time to complete their gates and god tier before facing Eide again.

Selmers let out a sigh and began her journey to catch up with the others. She froze time until she
reached the ship and was surprised to see Jack sitting there. He was non-hostile, too. He sat there, playing with his knife. When she started time back up again, everyone was startled by her sudden appearance. Mae jumped up and hugged her.

“Selmers, you’re okay!”

“Oh, of course, I’m okay. Did you think I couldn’t handle a pushover like Eide?”

“What did you do? He’s immortal as long as he’s a sprite. How did you stop him from following you?”, Mae questioned.

“Well, I didn’t kill him and I didn’t get the ring but I did buy us some time. My future-self came back and pulled Eide into the future. We’ll need to go back to Derse when we’re ready to face him so I can complete the time loop but that can wait until we’ve all god tiered.”, Selmers explained.

“That’s great! Hopefully next time I won’t be evil and I’ll get to use some of those fraymotifs. They sounded so cool and I’m sad I didn’t get to see any.”, Mae complained.

“I actually wanted to ask you something, cap’n.”, said Gregg.

“What is it?”

“I remember Mae almost killing me but then I saw you and Selmers use a fraymotif and suddenly I found myself alive with no sign that I was hurt. It was so weird but really cool at the same time. What was that?”

“That fraymotif was a combination of my ability to see the outcomes of different timelines and Selmers’ ability to travel through timelines. We found a timeline where you hadn’t died and transferred all of our minds into that timeline’s bodies.”

“Ugh, stop melting my brain.”, Mae moaned.

“Aw, you would travel through time just to save me? That’s so sweet!” Gregg hugged Angus. Angus hugged him back, “I would do anything for you, bug.”

“D’awwww, you two are so adorable!”, Mae playfully mocked.

“So, what now?”, asked Lori, “Our two biggest threats are gone, at least for now.”

“Why don’t we just take a break. We can all go do our separate things and recover from today. A lot has happened and we deserve a break.”, suggested Mae. Everyone agreed. They needed rest and thanks to Selmers, they wouldn’t have to worry about Eide for a while.

“Hey, Angus, could we spend some time together at our apartment?”, asked Gregg.

“I’d love to.”, replied Angus.

“Hey, Borowski? Maybe we could hang out for a while?”, suggested Bombshell, “I fell like there’s a lot about your life’s story I haven’t gotten to hear yet.”

“Uh, sure. Yeah, that’d be fine.”, Mae scratched the back of her head. Her dark fur mostly hid the fact that she was blushing.

Everyone else seemed to have plans for themselves for the rest of the day. Bea wanted to spend time with her parents, Selmers wanted to get some writing done, Lori wanted to train, and Germ
would probably just play video games while he waited.

“What’re we gonna do with him?”, asked Selmers, pointing at Jack.

“I guess I’ll keep him. I am the blood player so I guess I’m the one who would be best suited to befriend him.”, replied Bea.

With that, Bea’s planet was in view. Everyone got out, said their goodbyes, and left to relax.
Mae and Bombshell Arrived at Mae’s house. When Mae entered, her parents were there to greet her as usual.

“Welcome back, kitten. How was your little adventure?”, greeted Stan.

“I can tell you that adventure was anything but little.”, answered Bombshell.

“Oh, you brought your friend… um…” Candy tried to recall this friend’s name but she couldn’t seem to find it.

“People call me Bombshell. No one really knows my real name anymore. I prefer Bombshell anyways so it’s no big deal.”

Okay. What are your plans for the day?”, asked Candy.

“We’re all taking a break after our plan to stop Eide failed miserably.”, replied Mae.

“Oh, come on. It wasn’t that bad. We got one of the rings, Eide’s out of the picture for a while, and everyone’s alive. Honestly, that went better than I was expecting.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right.”, Mae reluctantly agreed.

“Now, let’s go to your room so you can tell me all about your life story. I’m extremely interested in this cult I’ve heard about.” A frown crept across Mae’s face. She knew Bombshell would want to know about the cult sometime but part of her hoped it wouldn’t be from her.

Once they reached Mae’s room, Bombshell asked, “So, what do you wanna do?”

“Well, we could watch movies on my laptop or I have Demontower. We could just talk if you wanted. Anything, really.”

“You have Demontower? I’ve always wanted to play that.”

“I can bring it up for you. It gets really hard, though once you get near the end.”, Mae warned.

“I’m not a stranger to hard games. I’m actually a pretty big gamer.”

“Really? I never took you for the gamer type.”

“Not all of us are socially awkward nerds. Some of us are just nerds.” Bombshell proceeded to play Demontower while Mae watched, amazed by how good she was.

“How did you get so good at video games?”, asked Mae.

“I play them a lot. It’s how I spend most of my free time.”, answered Bombshell.

“Germ and Angus play games a lot, too. Germ is mostly a classic gamer and Angus is more into MMOs.”

“Did he used to play Sword People Online?”

“Yes, actually. It was his favorite. It’s too bad we don’t have people to play it with anymore,
considering how everyone except for us is dead.”

“The internet seems to work fine here. I bet we could set up a server for all of us or something. Do you think the new universe will have internet?”

“I hope so. I don’t know how I’d live without the internet.” That got Bombshell to laugh. After about an hour and a half, Bombshell beat Demontower and got the true ending. Mae and Bombshell talked about the game for a couple of minutes before Bombshell decided to bring up the cult.

“So, you wanna tell me about the cult now? I’m dying to know.”, requested Bombshell. Mae froze, terrified. She didn’t want to be forced to recall everything that happened over that week.

“Mae! Dinner’s ready!”, Candy yelled up from downstairs.

Mae jumped on the opportunity to put off talking about the cult. “Uh, let’s go eat! Food sounds good! I’m starving, let’s go!” She practically dragged Bombshell downstairs.

After everyone was seated, Candy asked, “How’ve you two been so far?”

“We’ve been doing good. We played some games and I was finally about to get the rest of Mae’s life story when you called us down for dinner.”, replied Bombshell.

“The rest? How much have you told her?”, Candy asked Mae.

“When we first met, I kinda just told her about the ghosts and dropping out of college. I didn’t mention the cult because I was still recovering from that and I didn’t want to sound crazy, though I think the ghosts may have tipped you off to that fact.”

Candy looked back to Bombshell, “So… you don’t know about that yet, huh?”

“Not much. I was about to hear the whole thing from Mae before we came down.”

“Mae, are you sure you’re okay to tell that story again? It seemed like you were still really upset by it last time. Just stepping outside sent you into an episode.”

Mae became distraught, “Y-yeah, I’ll be fine.” She was sweating profusely and almost shaking but she didn’t want to look weak in front of Bombshell.

Bombshell spoke up, “If it bothers you, you don’t have to tell me. I’m sure someone else would be okay with it.”

“No! I’m fine. I can do this.” Mae struggled to keep her voice from shaking. There were too many bad memories. She wanted them to stop. Then, what Angus said came to mind.

“The only advice I can give you is to ask yourself, are you trying to live with it or are you trying to get rid of it?”

What was she doing? She wanted to say she was living with it but that would be a lie. Mae was trying to avoid it again. Could she face it? Was she strong enough?

“Borowski, are you there? Hello?” Bombshell was nudging Mae. She snapped back to reality.

Mae stood up, “Come on. I’m going to tell you everything. I can’t keep running away from this.” Bombshell followed Mae back up to her room. Both of them sat down on Mae’s bed.
Mae took a deep breath and began, “About a week after I got home from college, on Harfest, I saw some kid get kidnapped by who I now know is Eide. I chased him but I couldn’t catch him. A few days later, that’s when we first encountered them. They chased me and my friends and one of them tried to shoot me. I fell down a large hill and was knocked out. I woke up later and walked some distance before I fell unconscious again. The next time I woke up was in my room. I left without being seen and went to Gregg and Angus’ apartment. I went back to the mines once everyone was asleep and came face-to-face with Eide when Gregg shot him with his crossbow. We chased them into the mines and found ‘it’.” Mae shuddered. She was holding her stomach.

Bombshell asked, “What’s ‘it’?”

“The hole. The hole at the center of everything. The cult stood on the other side and they explained what they did. They fed the black goat by throwing people considered worthless into the hole. One of our best friends, Casey was one of them. We thought he had jumped a train like he always talked about but instead, he was thrown into some hole in the ground and left to rot inside the black goat, all because those assholes thought he wouldn’t contribute anything to society. They… they killed Casey. Casey’s dead. I’ll never get to see him again.” Mae was crying now.

“What happened to the cult?”

“Most of those insane fucks got what they deserved when Eide caused the mine to collapse when he tried to drag me back into the mines and we severed his arm with an elevator. It fell and caused a cave in but Eide somehow survived thanks to the black goat.”

Bombshell took a moment to process everything before asking, “So, was that what caused the mental problems I keep hearing about?”

“No. My mental problems started before I went to college. I told you about the soft ball incident, right?”

“Yeah but I don’t think you ever told me why it happened.”

“A short while before that, I was playing this dumb ghost dating sim game and that game was my life for a time. Then, one day, something in my head broke. I started seeing all of the characters on the screen as shapes. They weren’t real. They were just put there by someone else. That notion carried over to the real world. People on the street became shapes. Nothing was there for me, anymore. The softball game was when I broke. A kid named Andy Cullen was up to bat and he was shapes, too. In a fit of terror and rage, I beat him with my bat. Red shapes, everywhere. I had to go to therapy but my therapist was garbage. When I went to college, the shapes tormented me. I was terrified to even leave my room and I downed cough syrup just to sleep. I went home in a vain attempt to regain some sense of familiarity in my life but then all of that shit with the cult happened. Gregg and Angus were going to leave Possum Springs and Bea was stuck with a broken life working a job she hated to support her broken father. My parents were about to lose the house because of a deal they made to send me to college and I never even got a degree. I was a failure and it was hurting everyone around me. All I want is to stop hurting everyone but it’s not working. I don’t know what to do.”

Bombshell placed her hand on Mae’s shoulder, “Y’know, I don’t think any of that stuff was your fault. Life just didn’t work out. You were burdened with all of this shit and expected to somehow lead a normal life. The fact that you’re still able to live despite all of that shows just how badass you are. I don’t know how I would fare if I had been through all of that on top of this game. If you’re worried about being a failure, don’t be. All you need to do is be there and try your best. If it doesn’t work out, it doesn’t work out. That’s just how life is.”
“We have to win this game. We need to kill the black goat. Casey and all of the others who’ve died because of the cult and this game deserve that much. I’ll prove to everyone that I can still make a difference.” Mae hugged Bombshell, “Thanks for listening.”

“I’m the one who asked.” She hugged Mae back.

Bea finally had some time to reconnect with her parents and she couldn’t have been happier. She wasn’t exactly ecstatic to have Jack for company but he seemed to like doing his own thing anyway. Bea had so many questions she wanted to ask.

“What’s the afterlife like? I hope you were happy there.”

“I don’t really remember what the afterlife was like. It’s all a blur right now but that doesn’t matter. I’m here with you now and that makes me happy. I do have to say, us sprites don’t really get to do much. That John fellow is always telling you what to do before we get the chance to.”

“Yeah, but if it’ll give us a better chance at winning, we need to take it. This session has been a disaster so far.”

“Don’t be so sure. Most sessions would be doomed to fail at this point. The chances of winning SBURL are miniscule at best.”

“That’s reassuring.”

“It should be. Take it as a sign that Skaia has destined you to succeed.”

“I won’t get my hopes up. For all we know, the game could screw us over right at the end. Any number of things could go wrong.”

“Try not to think about it like that. Just keep going and whatever destiny has in store will come to pass.”

“I’m not sure what to think of destiny. It’s like it hates me. It took both of you from me and ruined my chance at a happy life and now, the world is gone and I’m stuck here in this goddamn game.”

“I’m sorry neither of us were there for you when you needed it. We’re here now, though so let’s make the most of that.”

“Love you.”

“Love you, too.”

Angus and Gregg arrived at their apartment and decided to watch some movies together. They watched some horror movies, laughing together at how bad some of them were and holding onto each other for comfort whenever one was scary. Actually, it was mostly Gregg holding onto Angus for comfort. Angus always found it hard to be scared at horror movies because of how illogical they were most of the time.

After a few hours of cuddling and watching movies, Angus went to prepare a nice dinner. He decided on lasagna. It was one of their favorites and they had it fairly often. Soon, they were eating dinner together and talking about the day’s events.

“Man, today was crazy! I can’t believe that Jack is on our side, now! Eide’s gone, too! Things are finally starting to look up!”, Gregg ranted.
I do have to admit, it’s good to experience a victory for once, even if it wasn’t as big as we were expecting.”

“Yeah! This just got us one step closer to kicking Eide’s ass! He deserves that much, at least.” Gregg stuck one of his normal knives into the table with conviction in his eyes, as if the table was Eide.

Angus smiled softly, “Don’t worry, he’ll get everything that’s coming to him, I promise you.” He wrapped his hands around Gregg’s.

Gregg smirked cockily, “That bastard won’t know what hit him.”

Angus’ face took on a more serious tone, “Promise me you won’t do anything reckless.”

“… I promise.”

Soon, their plates were wiped clean. It had been a while since Gregg and Angus got to be alone together without any sort of problem or conflict. It was revitalizing and it brought some much-needed joy into their lives.

“It’s getting late. We should go to sleep. I bet Prospit could use some help right now.”

“Wait!”, Gregg began to blush, “Uh, do you think I could, um, sleep with you tonight? Y’know, since I’m already here so I thought-“

Angus laughed, “Of course you can stay. I wouldn’t mind some company while I plunge myself into the darkest depths of the furthest ring.”

Gregg shrank away a bit, “Right, I forgot about that. I hope it’s not too horrible.”

“Actually, last night was weird. Bea and I were in Mae’s dream and she said it was like the dreams she’d been having after coming home. I don’t know if that’ll happen again tonight.”

“What were her dreams like?”

“Everything was dark and according to her, music would normally play in the background as she searched for four musicians to end the dream. It’s probably the singing the cult mentioned when they were talking about the black goat.”

Gregg sighed, “Well if Eide’s out of the timeline, for now, I don’t think it would make sense for him to be able to give you dreams.”

“Honestly, I would rather have Mae’s dreams than be stuck in the furthest ring. Maybe we could get Germ to kill off all of the horrorterrors.”

“He can do that?”

“If he uses his powers correctly, it would be easy. The horrorterrors are beings of the void so it makes sense that Germ could destroy them, being a Bard of Void.”, he laughed, “But I doubt he’ll do that anytime soon.”

“Germ never runs out of surprises, does he?”

“Trust me, he never will.”

Gregg yawned, “Come on, cap’n, let’s get some sleep. We have gates to complete and god tiers to
“Alright, bug.”

“Come on! Put your body into it!”

Lori wound her arm back for a swing but her mother stopped her in her tracks when the tip of her machete was placed directly over her heart.

“If this was a real fight, you’d be dead right now. Your arm can’t do all of the work. You need to use your body. Always be moving and use that momentum to empower your strikes instead of relying on your arm. The way you’re swinging right now is leaving you wide open. Try again.”

Lori took her mother’s advice into consideration and got into her fighting stance. Her mother attacked first with a horizontal swipe. Lori lunged forward, bringing her body below the swing and giving her the chance to thrust. Her mother dodged and thrust her machete down on Lori. Lori parried the strike but lost her balance doing so. She fell back and barely managed to block a downward swing from her mother.

“What now? You’re on the ground and you’re stuck blocking this. What’s your next move?”

Lori coiled up her legs and kicked with all her might, using the momentum from the motion to bring herself to her feet. Her mother was stunned. Lori charged at her mother, planning to deal the finishing blow when she felt something on her neck. It was a blade. Lori realized that in the heat of the moment, she had brought her blade behind her for a swing, leaving her wide open, just like her mother had said.

The two stared at each other for a moment before Lori’s mother said, “I think that’s good for today. It’s about time you go to bed.” She sheathed her machete and began to float away when Lori took one final swing at her mother. It was deflected seamlessly. That got her to snicker, “I thought you liked horror movies, not cheesy action movies. The ‘student catches master off guard’ moment is a cliche. It’s just something they put into sappy underdog stories for dramatic effect. It never actually works unless the teacher is bad.”

Lori sighed and followed her mother inside and went to bed.

Selmers was at home, trying to write a poem but her mind was blank. Was this what writer’s block felt like? She groaned and laid down, throwing down her journal and pen. She stared at the ceiling until Mr. Chazokov came to visit her.

“Hey, Chazokov. What’s up?”, she greeted.

“Why, hello, Selma. It would appear that I am up at the moment.”

“Very clever.”, replied Selmers sarcastically.

“Thank you. I came up with it myself.”

“I can tell.”

“So, it seems like you’re experiencing some trouble coming up with poems. Am I correct?”

“Mhm.”

“My stargazing has gone downhill, too. There are no stars to gaze at anymore and with John reach.”
basically doing my job for me, I’m just stuck here doing nothing all day. It’s quite sad if you think about it.”

“Is it selfish of me to say that this game is one of the best things to ever happen to me? Like, after my life went to complete shit, I was always jealous of people who got good lives for a fraction of the work I put in to make it to my dead-end life. This game is like a second chance but I still feel bad knowing so many people died and there are even some of us who had hopes and dreams and had to give all of it up. Am I wrong for being happy?”

“You can’t really control how you feel. The world was going to end anyway. As long as you make good on everyone’s sacrifices, I think you deserve to be happy.”

Selmers looked over to her journal for a moment before picking it back up and beginning to write. Mr. Chazokov smiled and floated away, leaving Selmers to her work.

Germ was the only one who didn’t go home that day. He had an idea. He flew past the asteroid field, known as the veil, out to the furthest ring without anyone’s knowledge and he turned off his phone. No one could deter him from what he was about to attempt.

Just like last time, the horrorterrors were nowhere to be seen once he arrived. The black, empty expanse had the potential to consume those unfortunate enough to find themselves there but Germ was unaffected due to his power over the void.

Germ called out to the void, “Hi. It’s me again. I’m just gonna get straight to the point. I’m here to kill you. Nothing personal but I need to climb my echeladder. I won’t kill all of you, just enough to reach the top.”

He reached out and to an outside viewer, it would appear as if nothing was happening when in reality, the horrorterrors were being torn apart by the void they called home. Germ was there for about an hour before he reached the top of his echeladder. So many horrorterrors were destroyed but Germ wanted to god tier.

As Germ was about to fly back, he opened his phone.

GT: Congratulations, you just murdered a bunch of extremely powerful eldritch beings.

GW: That was fun! Can I god tier, now?

GT: Actually, there’s something else you might want to do.

GW: What?

GT: See if you can force the horrorterrors to make dream bubbles.

GW: What?

GT: A dream bubble basically acts as an afterlife in case you fail and it’ll give your players with only one self someplace to dream.

GW: Okay.

Germ turned back around and asked, “Before I leave, can you make some dream bubbles?”

The horrorterrors knew better than to mess with him and began blowing out dream bubbles.
“Thank you.”

He returned to his planet and searched for the quest bed. It didn’t take him long to find.

“How am I going to do this? I can’t risk destroying the bed.”, he muttered to himself once on his quest bed. A few minutes of mulling over this brought Germ to a conclusion. He took out a gas grenade.

“No regrets.” He threw down the grenade and stood there.

Gregg woke up on Prospit and was scared to see what had changed. He looked outside and what he saw was not what he had expected. Hundreds of Prospitans marched down the street towards the castle. Airships flooded the sky, all heading towards Skaia. It was a last-ditch effort to win the war and take vengeance on the Dersites who killed their queen.

Gregg flew outside, searching for Germ and Lori. He found Lori, who’d also been looking for him.

“What are they doing?!”, Lori was visibly shaken.

“I think they’re making a last push for Skaia.”

“Last push?! This can’t be their last push! We still have four gates to complete and only one of us has god tiered!” Lori was breathing frantically.

Gregg realized Lori was right. It didn’t matter how many people they sent. The black king was too powerful. It was then that a bright light shone from Skaia. Someone else had god tiered. Who could have god tiered in such a short time?

“Germ.”, said Lori.


“You were with Angus, Mae was with Bombshell, I was training, and Bea said she wanted to spend time with her sprite. That leaves Germ.”

“How did he level up so fast?” Gregg pondered this for a moment. Realization hit him once more, “Angus. He knew he would do this.”

“Do what?”, asked Lori.

“He killed the horrorterrors. Angus said something about him being able to do that but he brushed it off and then told me that Germ would never run out of surprises. He knew and he played me.” He laughed, happy that progress was still being made. This gave him hope.

“What should we do now?”, asked Lori.

“We wait to wake up, I guess. There’s not much else we can do.”

“Wanna train?”

“What is it with you and training?”

“I just don’t want to be a liability. Everyone else can use their cool powers and are better than me at fighting.”

“Well, Bea did die fighting lizard people.”
Lori laughed, “I think that was because they teamed up on her.”

“Still, come on. They’re small lizards with spears.”

“A knife probably wouldn’t be good against spears. Honestly, I don’t think knives are a very good choice in general.”

Gregg gasped, “You take that back! Knives are the best! They’re so fast!”

“Yeah, but their range is garbage. If someone knew how to properly distance themselves, they could win easily.”

“That’s why you don’t give the enemy a chance to distance themselves.”

Lori looked down to one of the fences. She flew down and broke off two long pieces of metal, breaking one in half. “Here, show me.” She tossed Gregg the two smaller pieces.

Gregg smiled wide, excited to have a new sparring partner. He ran at Lori and sliced with his right hand, followed by his right. Lori parried both but Gregg wasn’t letting up. He thrust with both daggers and Lori dodged to the side and made her first swing. Gregg blocked it and pushed back, forcing Lori to continue blocking the one dagger while he went for a stab with his other. Lori swerved around the dagger she was blocking, letting both fly past her. Gregg stumbled forward due to putting his weight into pushing Lori’s weapon back. Gregg felt the tip of Lori’s pole poke at his back and he knew he had lost.

Gregg sighed, “Wow, you won. What kind of training are you going through to get that good?”

“My mother’s training methods are grueling and some might even consider it cruel but it forces me to master techniques quickly or face painful injuries. She won’t kill me but if the opportunity arises, she’ll teach me by showing me what happens when you fail in a real fight.”, Lori explained.

“That seems like a bit much, especially for a mother to put her child through.”

“Her willingness to injure me probably comes from the horror movie I prototyped. Also, especially now, we’re running out of time. We need to be as strong as possible when we go to finish this game.”

“I guess you’re right. Wanna train some more? We still have a while before we wake up.”, asked Gregg.

Lori readied her battle stance once more, “Anytime.”

Bombshell was now all alone at the center of Derse. Selmers was no longer there due to god tiering.

“Why you gotta do this to me, Selms?”, she said to herself. There was a slight echo in the empty core of Derse.

Bombshell sighed and decided to head up to the surface. When she emerged above ground, the full extent of the destruction caused by Eide and Jack became clear. The house she rose from had crumbled, as had most buildings in a 5-mile radius of the castle. That battle truly was a battle of gods. The streets were empty and desolate. Any people that were there were buried under the rubble of destroyed houses.

After some exploring, Bombshell saw that the areas outside of the destruction were on high alert.
People weren’t allowed to leave their houses and guards patrolled the streets. A hunt was on for Jack. Airships flew overhead in all directions. They were all searching for Jack. He would be punished for his crimes against the queen.

Being the last Derse dreamer was scary. You were all on your own on a planet that wanted you dead. At least if you died, you would just wake up. Bombshell wasn’t sure what to do. There was no point in trying to fight the entire Derse military and the queen was dead, the ring already taken. What was left?

As she pondered this, a bright light shone from Skaia. Bombshell smiled, wondering who the new god tier was. She would find out later, though. For now, she thought it would be best if she returned to the center of Derse and wait it out, maybe play around with her space powers a while.

Mae woke up but she wasn’t in the furthest ring or one of her dreams. Instead, she woke up in what she recognized as her room. Had she not fallen asleep? She felt like she was asleep but if that was the case, why was she in her room? She ran downstairs to see herself. Her back was turned and she was wearing a dark purple costume.

“Who are you?” Mae asked.

Her other self turned around, revealing eyes with no pupils or iris.

“Oh my god, what happened to your eyes?!”

“Wait, are you me?”, asked the other Mae.

“Am I? I just went to sleep and I woke up in my room.”

“That’s strange. I just got here, myself. I remember dying and then nothingness for some period of time. Then, I suddenly appeared here.”

“Wait, you died? How? It looks like you god tiered.” Mae had so many questions for this other Mae.

“I think I’m from a doomed timeline. You’ve had the fight with Eide where you turn evil, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Huh. You haven’t god tiered yet. I guess that’s where we went wrong. I god tiered too early so when I turned evil, the fight resulted in almost everyone dying. Not even Selmers could stop me. She died a heroic death. No one else had god tiered so they were easy pickings. It wasn’t until I got around to killing Angus that Gregg finally did me in. Before I died, I saw Gregg stab himself. That was the end of that session and the black goat was left to wander off into the furthest ring and search out new victims.”, the other Mae explained.

“Holy shit.”, was all Mae could say. There was a knock at the door. Mae opened it to see Bea. Angus stood behind her.

“Bea? Are you my Bea or a different Bea?”

“We can tell who’s who by our eyes. Us three are the ones that are asleep. So, yes, I am your Bea.”

“You mean there’s more?!”, exclaimed Mae.

“Yes. There are many more. Each one is from a different timeline, all of which have been doomed
ones.”, replied Angus.

“So, is this like the afterlife?”, asked Mae.

“I believe so but what’s strange is that everyone here says they only just appeared here.”, Angus answered.

Bea pointed behind Mae, “What’s her story?”

Mae realized she was talking about the god tier Mae. “Uh, she god tiered before our fight to get the rings back so when she turned evil, she kinda killed everyone except for Gregg who killed her after Angus died and then proceeded to kill himself.”

“So, she’s from that timeline. There are other people from that timeline here, too.”, said Angus.

“Wait, the others are here?!”, yelled god tier Mae as she ran to the door.

“They’re out there. You can find them around town. They’re all just as confused as you are.”

The god tier Mae ran past everyone into the snowy streets of Possum Springs. The others followed, curious to see what would happen. The first person the other Mae ran into was another version of Bea.

“Bea! Is that you?!”

The dead Bea turned around and was greeted by two of a familiar face.

“Oh god, there are two of you now?” Bea smirked, “This is a disaster waiting to happen.”

“Are you from the timeline where I…”, god tier Mae’s voice trailed off.

“Right, that…”

“I’m sorry. It’s my fault we’re dead. I shouldn’t have put on the ring.”

Mae was intrigued to see how her friends would react to her ruining the session. She hoped this would quell some of her fears.

“It’s fine. It wasn’t exactly pleasant but I’ve forgiven you at this point.”

“Mae? Is that you, dude?”

Across the street was Gregg accompanied by Angus. God Mae looked at him and shrank away. She was terrified to face him after everything she’d done to him. He’d probably suffered the worst out of everyone. To her surprise, though, Gregg’s first reaction was to run up and hug her.

“You’re back! I’m so sorry I killed you. I was just so sad and angry and I wasn’t thinking straight and then I-“

“Gregg, what are you talking about. You had every right to kill me. I took everything from everyone, most of all you. I should be the one apologizing.”

“Maybe you’re right. That was a pretty dumb move on your part but you couldn’t have known that would happen. I’m just glad you’re back.”

Mae let out a laugh, “We’re still dead, though.”
“Yeah. It’s too bad being a ghost isn’t like it is in the movies. I could haunt the shit out of some people.”

Angus joined the conversation, “I don’t think there’s anyone to haunt here, even if we did have ghost powers.”

“Hey, big guy. Uh, welcome to the afterlife reunion, I guess. Do you know where the rest of us are? I’d like to get a chance to formally apologize to everyone.”

At that moment, everyone else arrived, including both Selmers’, who were busy chatting with each other.

“Oh, there they are.”, said god Mae.

“Hey, killer.”, Lori greeted.

“I guess that actually fits this time, doesn’t it?”, replied Mae.

“Yeah, that was pretty brutal how you killed everyone.”, added Germ.

“Germ!”, Gregg scolded.

“What? I figured it was best to get it out of the way.”

“Okay, everyone’s here now. I just wanted to say I’m sorry for everything I did. Now, we’re all dead and our session is over because of me.”, dead Mae apologized.

“Don’t sweat it. Our chances of winning weren’t exactly great, to begin with. I honestly expected this much.”, said Bombshell.

“Besides, look around. We’re home again. There are worse places to spend the rest of eternity.”, Bea added.

“How are we here?”, asked the dead Angus.

“Our Germ must’ve done something. We’re supposed to be dreaming in the furthest ring but instead, we’re here, meeting our alternate timeline selves. He did plan on visiting the furthest ring to grind his way up to god tier so it had to have happened then.”, living Angus theorized.

“This is so weird. It’s like I have two boyfriends now.”, said Gregg. That got both Angus’ to laugh.

“It’s too bad our Gregg can’t be here. We could have so much fun. Double the crimes!” Mae threw her hands up into the air.

“You realize that would mean Gregg died at least once, right?”, Angus questioned.

“Oh, right.”

“I’d actually like some details as to how exactly we’re all here, especially you, Mae. You were a god tier, which means someone killed you. I was the second to last person to die so it had to be… oh.” The dead Angus looked at Gregg who looked away out of guilt.

“Yeah, it was… Gregg.”, Mae confirmed.

“If Gregg killed you, how did he die?”, asked Angus. The guilt and shame on Gregg’s face seemed to multiply at that.
“I… killed myself. After I lost you, I couldn’t take it anymore. I gave up. I’m sorry…” Gregg’s voice trailed off.

Angus’ only response to that was to walk up and hug Gregg. “It’s okay.”

The living Angus saw this exchange and it made him realize just how much he meant in Gregg’s world. If he wasn’t there, it wasn’t a life Gregg felt was worth living. Tears silently streamed down his face as everyone watched Gregg and Angus hug.

“Group hug!”, yelled the living Mae as she threw herself into the hug. Everyone else joined in, as well.

“So, what now?”, asked dead Mae.

“I think we just live out eternity in Possum Springs. We can do anything we want.”, Angus answered.

“How about us?”, questioned Mae.

The living Bea replied, “I think we just wait until we wake up.”

Gregg lit up, “Mae, both of you, let’s go smash some light bulbs!”

Both Maes replied simultaneously, “Crimes!”, and ran off with Gregg.

Bea laughed, “Those two can be so childish sometimes… but that’s what makes them fun to be around. We need some child-like joy in our lives right now.”

“It’s quite amazing if you consider what they’ve been through.”, added Angus.

“Yeah. It really is.”
GT: How is everyone?

MB: Great! You better have an explanation for what happened last night.

GT: Last night, you dreamt in what are known as dream bubbles. When Germ went grinding in the furthest ring, I told him to force the horrorterrors to create dream bubbles.

MB: Why were there other versions of us in there?

GT: Dream bubbles act as both a place for people with one self to dream as well as a place where dead people can live within their memories together.

GL: Was Casey there?

MB: No, sorry.

GT: You won’t find anyone who died pre-medium in the dream bubbles unless they’re from another timeline.

GL: Fuck!

LM: There might still be hope. Remember when you talked to me about how you were afraid the black goat still had Casey and everyone who it ate?

GL: Yeah.

LM: Well, if that’s true, their souls might still be inside of it and if we kill the black goat, there’s a small chance they could take refuge in the dream bubbles. It’s only a theory but it’s still a possibility.

GL: That’s even more reason for us to kick Eide’s ass!

BS: Being in the dream bubble was actually scary. It really put into perspective how one wrong move could get us all killed. In the other timeline, Mae god tiered before we tried to steal the rings, which you’d think would be a good thing but Mae still turned evil and the extra power let her kill everyone except for Gregg, who killed her after Angus died before killing himself. The whole session was destroyed by what would normally be considered a good thing.

GL: I killed Mae?

MB: Yeah, it was probably for the best, though. It was so heartwarming getting to see everyone make up and hug each other. If Mae hadn’t died while evil, she would’ve lived forever alone in the medium. It’s sad to think that there’s probably a timeline where that happened.

AD: Bug, please never kill yourself for me.

GL: I can’t promise that. You mean too much to me.
AD: Yeah, I know. It’s just scary to see how much I mean to you. I don’t want you being reckless for me but I know you will anyway.

GL: If you’re so worried about it, make sure you’re never in a situation where I have to do that, okay?

AD: Okay.

SF: Wow, am I the only one who just thought that experience was cool? I got to talk to myself and I do have to admit, I am pretty cool.

MB: It was still cool. Me and god Mae got to do crimes with Gregg.

GL: You did crimes without me?! How dare you?!

MB: I’m sorry but you haven’t died yet. When you die or god tier, you’ll get to be with us.

GL: Let’s try to keep it from being dying.

GT: I think now is a good time to begin the fourth gates. Selmers, do you think you could go to Bombshell’s planet and breed frogs while everyone else completes the fourth gate?

SF: I guess.

GW: It’s time to try out some cool new void powers.

GT: On that topic, I suggest that everyone that can should use their powers as much as possible. It’ll level you up faster and your abilities tend to be good in battle anyway.

GL: It’s time to DO THE WINDY THING!!!

MB: It’s time to do the… ragey thing? That doesn’t sound nearly as good.

BS: You tried.

Everyone left to build up their houses again. It was done before too long and they prepared to enter a gate once more.

Mae was now on Bea’s planet. Compared to Bombshell’s and Selmers’ planets, this was much more depressing. The sky was blanketed in smoke. One would expect this from a place covered in factories but the smoke wasn’t coming from the factories. It was being produced by fires. The factories and prisons were on fire!

Mae ran over to see why there were fires all over the place and she found the scene Selmers had left when she passed through. Heads impaled on spears with the message in the middle. This time, however, there were many more bodies scattered around the place. Mae heard fighting in the distance. There was a revolt going on. The people were revolting against their masters, the people who forced them to work themselves to death without compensation and the people who killed them if they didn’t do what they were told.

When she reached the main scene of the battle, the chaos was overwhelming. It was amazing how
different the societies were on each planet. On Mae’s, simply finding a shop to buy fraymotifs was incredibly difficult. She had managed to find a small shop in the caves but that took about an hour. Her people were extremely scattered with no sense of community.

Mae wasn’t sure what she should do. She didn’t know how to handle this situation. From what she could tell, the battle was in favor of the elites. There were more people from the lower class fighting for their freedom but the upper class had access to weapons and technology that made their smaller numbers a non-factor.

The decision was ultimately to simply join in the fray. There was no plan. Mae wasn’t very good with plans but she was begrudgingly good at smashing skulls so that’s what she did. She wasn’t sure why she felt the need to get involved. All she knew was that she was there now so she should make it count. Killing the lizards was easy now. Her level was well above what she needed to put up a fight. Mae left a trail of blood and bodies behind her as she charged through the ranks.

As the fight drew on, Mae could feel the intensity of her emotions rising. She wasn’t trying to actively steal rage, it just came to her. Minute by minute, they expanded, threatening to consume her. Once Mae realized this, it was a struggle not to let her fear overtake her. If she became scared of herself, she knew that would trigger an episode. Eventually, it simply became too much. In a last-ditch effort to stop herself, she curled into a ball on the floor and tried to retreat into her mind. What had slipped her mind was that she was still on a battlefield.

Mae was broken out of her despondent state by a sharp pain in her side. Mae opened her eyes to the sight of blood and a spearhead. Someone had stabbed her in the back. She felt the assailant attempt to pull the spear out but it was stuck. Mae remembered what Bea said about removing arrows and realized it applied here as well. She grabbed the spear head and pulled. She screamed as she ripped the rest of the spear through her body.

Blood and adrenaline consumed Mae. She took her bat and looked at her attacker. Mae now had her Hellpyre drawn. She had avoided using it in this battle because she didn’t want people to be burning to death but that was the last thing on her mind at the moment. These shapes needed to be purged. She swung, the person in front of her burning to ash. She looked around and saw that no one else was shapes.

Suddenly, someone else attacked Mae. Mae dodged and they faded into shapes. Not a moment later, they were ashes scattering in the wind.

Take it! Take their rage!

“This anger, these emotions, the shapes, they’re all a part of me, now…”

You’re in control now! Come on, do it!

“…but I won’t let it control me. I choose to live with it! I AM IN CONTROL OF MY LIFE!!!”

Mae felt the battle begin to die down as everyone lost their anger. She was taking it from both sides. It drowned out all other thoughts and emotions and Mae began blazing a trail of ash and blood as the black flames spread to consume the opposing forces. Her opponents had all become shapes. They became the thing that had once threatened to take her life from her. She wouldn’t let them live for that.

The battle was over before Mae even felt like she had gotten started. When there was no one left to
kill, her emotions died down and weakness drove its way into her body. She still had a hole in her from earlier. Her gate opened and she slowly walked through it, the cheers of the victors flying over her.

MB: Guys, I pulled a Bea and got stabbed by lizard people. If anyone’s there, please send help.

Bea saw this message as she took down the boss of her gate. She rushed to Mae’s aid. When she arrived, Mae was collapsed on the ground and both of her parents were kneeling beside her. Her sprite was trying to heal her. Bea rushed past and added what healing she could do to the mix.

Bea was crying, “Don’t you dare die on me, you asshole! You are NOT leaving me here!”

“I’m sorry. I was being an idiot. Please forgive me.” Mae’s voice was weak and shaky.

“No, don’t apologize! You’re not going to have anything to apologize for because you are going to live!”

Mae’s parents were holding each other, crying. They wished they could do something but they couldn’t. They were powerless.

Mae wasn’t ready to die, yet. She was trying to think of a way to fix this when she realized, “My echeladder! Get me to D-“, she began coughing up blood but Bea knew what she meant. Bea threw her phone to Mae’s parents.

“Tell Bombshell to get to my planet, NOW!” They did as they were told. “You, help me get Mae to my planet!”, she commanded to Mae’s granddad.

“Wait, I need to give her this.” He pulled out a medallion. “This will let her call me to her from anywhere. She’s lucky she chose now to start dying or I wouldn’t be able to help.”

“Okay, let’s go!” Mae’s granddad created a spectral platform and began floating Mae up while Bea kept her alive. They eventually reached the sixth gate and flew through. Mae activated the medallion as she entered and her sprite appeared on the other side.

When they made it back to Bea’s house, Bombshell was waiting for them. Mae’s granddad laid Mae down gently into the ship and Bea told Bombshell to fly them to Derse. The flight was silent and tension clouded the airship.

By the time they reached Derse, Mae was barely breathing. Bombshell began to open up the floor like before when guards arrived. They had seen the ship land and came to investigate.

“Keep healing her.” Said Mae’s granddad. He began fighting them off with lasers and throwing them around with his sprite powers. Bea could tell that without the sprite’s support, Mae was beginning to slip away.

“You need to go faster!”, Bea yelled to Bombshell.

“I’m almost there!” The ground began to shake as Bombshell forced her way down faster than ever before.

A few moments later, Bea felt the flow of blood through Mae’s veins come to a halt as her body went cold.
“I’m in!” Bea heard this and sprang into action. She lifted Mae up and jumped into the hole, not bothering to use her jetpack to slow the descent. She slowed herself at the last second and tried to find the slab with Mae’s symbol on it when she realized she didn’t know what it was.

“Which one is it?”, Bea asked.

“We know that one is Selmers’ and I’m sleeping on mine. It’s probably the purple one since you’re blood and the last one looks like a blood symbol.”, answered Bombshell.

Bea set Mae down on the purple one and hoped Bombshell was right. They didn’t have time to ask John. To Bea’s delight, the slab began to glow and Mae’s body began to float. She disappeared and Bea and Bombshell flew up to see if Skaia would glow. They saw the bright light and they knew they had succeeded.

Mae woke up and looked around. The landscape was covered in white and black squares. A great battle was taking place around her. She looked up and saw battleships from both sides flying in, more so from Prospit. When she looked at herself, she saw that her outfit was replaced by purple clothing with a strange symbol on her chest. She was also given a hood which she chose to keep down.

Mae decided to explore a bit before going to get her stuff. She could clearly tell that the Dersites were winning. Soon, she saw a huge black figure looming in the distance. It was the black king. He was huge and he was blasting the white armies away with his godly might. Mae knew this was the final boss and she was terrified. Eide was one thing but this was on another level. He could kill dozens with a flick of his finger and he often ended up killing his own soldiers. None of that mattered, however, because the black king was powerful enough to take on the entire Prospitan army by himself if he needed to.

Mae had made the mistake of staring for too long. The black king saw her and fired a beam at her. Mae barely flew out of the way. She knew she wouldn’t be a match for him so she flew away, dodging a few more blasts as she headed for Derse.

Bea and Bombshell decided to wait for Mae to get back so she could get her stuff and Bombshell could close the hole. Mae arrived sooner than they thought and they waved to her. Mae landed and Bea hugged her, “Don’t you ever do that to me again! What even happened?”

“I was on your planet and the people were revolting so I helped them. Eff da cops! Unfortunately, I had another episode and I, being the dumbass that I am, decided to curl into a ball on the floor and I got stabbed. I then proceeded to go on a rampage using the almighty power of adrenaline and I won the battle while stopping myself from killing everyone. Then, I walked through my gate and collapsed on the ground in front of my house. You know the rest.”

Bea sighed, “You’re lucky we saved you. You need to stop being so reckless. Also, did you really have to say you ‘pulled a Bea’ when you called for help?”

“I just thought that if I was going to die, I would leave you all with one last joke before I left.”

“Oh, really? Look, just don’t die again, okay?”

“I’ll try. Come on, let’s go home. My parents are probably worried sick. Actually, I’ll just let you go home and I’ll fly home with granddad after I get my stuff.”
“Fine.

Mae jumped into the hole and grabbed her gear and said goodbye to Bea and Bombshell before flying away. Once she got home, Candy and Stan ran up and hugged her.

“Im back!”

“We were so worried about you! This is a miracle!” exclaimed Candy.

“Welcome home, kitten. We love you.”

Mae sat down with her parents and explained exactly what happened.

“So, your old clothes are gone? That’s a shame. These new clothes seem… strange.” said Stan.

“They’re pretty gaudy.” added Candy.

“Hey! Don’t insult my new god clothes! It’s not like I had a choice!”, Mae replied.

“Also, you can’t die now? How does that work?”

“Apparently, I can only die permanently if I die in a way the game considers heroic or just. Basically, as long as I don’t randomly start murdering people or taking bullets for people, I can’t die.”

“That’s pretty handy, considering you’ve died twice, now.” said Candy.

“You make it sound so casual.”

“Honestly, it seems that way at this point. How many people have died and are just going on like nothing happened? Dying in this game doesn’t seem to mean much. In fact, sometimes, it’s beneficial to kill yourself! You’re immortal now because you died!” Candy was laughing.

“It was still painful and traumatizing! I’d like to see you die and come back and tell me it was a pleasant experience… Actually, please don’t die. We can’t bring you back because you don’t have a dream-self or a quest bed.”

“Y’know, all of this has really got my beliefs confused. It’s hard to continue being a Christian when your daughter just died and was brought back by lying on some stone slab in the middle of another planet.”

“I can’t relate. I’ve already met god or maybe I didn’t but it seemed like it and he was an asshole who didn’t care about anyone. I can’t just say it was a dream, either, because I know now that the black goat was able to sing to me in my dreams. I don’t know, it’s all still really confusing.”, Mae attempted to explain.

At this point, Mae’s parents already knew enough about Mae’s experience with the black goat not to question her sanity when she said this.

“Maybe you should get back to your friends and tell them you’re back.”, Stan suggested.
“Yeah, okay.” Mae hopped up and ran up to her room. She opened up her laptop, ready to build if that’s what everyone decided to do.

**MB:** Guess who’s back?

**GL:** Aw, yeah! I hear you’re a god tier, now. Is that right?

**MB:** You know it!

**GL:** Awesome, dude!

**MB:** So how were everyone else’s gates?

**GL:** Fine. Nothing special.

**AD:** Same, here.

**LM:** I got to see everyone’s god tier costumes. Germ has it rough. Mine isn’t exactly fashionable, either.

**MB:** Oh yeah! I remember that! Both of yours’ are so funny. Germ’s is worse, though.

**GW:** I don’t mind.

**MB:** You mean you’re actually going to wear it?! Come on, don’t tell me you only have one set of clothes.

**GW:** It’s not that, I just think they’re comfy.

**BS:** What makes them so bad?

**GT:** Let’s just say bard is a male-only class for a reason.

**BS:** I think I get the picture.

**GL:** That’s just weird. I hope mine isn’t too bad.

**MB:** Your costume is cool. You get this cool blue bandana that covers your eyes. My only complaint is the yellow boots that come with it clash pretty hard with the blue of the rest of the outfit. Also, pro tip, if you want to save your clothes, take them off before you god tier. My clothes are gone, now. That was my only shirt!

**GT:** Actually, you get your clothes back once you win the game. You still get to keep the god tier costumes, though.

**LM:** That’s good to hear. I didn’t want to live the rest of my life without pants.

**GL:** Okay, what is up with these costumes? Why do some of them seem so bad?

**GT:** I can’t answer that. It’s just how the game is.

**BS:** Oh, god, I hope mine isn’t too bad.
MB: I’d give yours a meh. Too much brown but nothing too offensive or strange.

AD: I get to see them soon, don’t I? Selmers is my next gate.

MB: Don’t worry, big guy. Yours is really cool. I think you’ll like that yours is green since you always wear that green sweater.

AD: Green is fine.

GT: I guess we’ll just stick to the routine. The rest of the day is yours to spend as you please.

GL: I’m gonna grind. I’m actually pretty close to reaching god tier. I also want to brush up on my knife fighting before I spar with Lori again.

MB: You spar with Lori?

GL: Yeah. When we sleep, we spar together and she keeps beating me. I need to be better for tonight.

LM: Don’t think I won’t improve, too. Prepare yourself.

AD: I guess I’ll grind as well.

BS: I think I’ll lay back for today. I need to relax after all of the stress Mae put me through. I do have to admit, all of that healing was useful for my echeladder. I’m almost to the top.

MB: I’ll take some time to cool off, too. Dying and coming back is hard work.

BS: You didn’t even do anything. It was Bombshell and I that took you all the way to Derse.

MB: And I had to not die that entire time. It was painful. There was a hole in me!

BS: Whatever.

MB: Hey, we should hang out! I can come over!

BS: Really?

MB: Yeah, why not? I don’t have any plans.

BS: If that’s what you want, be my guest.

MB: Yay!

SF: Bombshell, you should come help me with this frog breeding.

BS: Sounds good. I’ll be right there.

MB: What are you gonna do, Germ.

GW: Not sure. Whatever comes to me, I guess.
MB: Come hang out with me and Bea!

GW: Alright.

BS: What? Mae, why are you just randomly inviting people over to my house?

MB: Because he’s our friend and friends invite friends over to other friends’ houses.

BS: First, you used friend way too many times in that sentence. Second, I don’t think that’s how it’s supposed to work.

MB: Come on, it’ll be fun!

BS: Fine.

MB: Alright! I’ll be right over.

GT: Guess that’s everyone’s plans settled for tonight. Have fun.

Lori and her mother joined for another training session.

“Today’s training will be different from last time. So far, you’ve only trained with someone on the same playing field as you. Yes, it is good for learning the basics but your denizen, the black king, and Eide are not on your level. That is why I will be giving you a new opponent.”, Lori’s mother explained. She created a large, yet still humanoid creature with her powers.

Lori gripped her Spirit Chain, ready to strike. The towering beast stomped down, it’s foot as large as Lori. Lori dodged back and flew up with her jetpack and stuck the machete into the creature’s stomach, continuing to fly up as she did so. This created a large gash in the monster.

The monster screeched and grabbed Lori as she flew up. Lori was brought up to the creature’s face, which was completely blank. A hole opened in its face as it charged a beam. Lori pushed back and activated her jetpack again, burning its fingers. It let her go and she flew out of the way just before the monster fired.

Lori looked down to see that the cut she had made before had healed. She flew into its neck and made a large cut, hoping it would be fatal. It wasn’t and it healed just the same. At that moment, the beast released a shockwave and Lori’s jetpack turned off. She fell, unsure what to do. She decided to take the jetpack and throw it, pushing her just close enough to the monster to stick her machete into it and come to a halt, dangling from its back. Lori took out her normal machete and used both Machetes to climb up.

As she scaled the creature’s back, it began to try and shake her off. Lori managed to hang on but only barely. Eventually, Lori made it up to the top and positioned herself in front of its face. She had an idea. As she expected, the monster charged another laser. Lori swung out of the way as it fired and when it stopped, the hole in its face was still there for a moment. Lori did the same thing she had done with the cyclops back from the first gate and threw her machete into the hole. This time, the creature finally died. It fell back and faded away. Lori stood triumphantly and looked at her mother with pride.

“Not bad.”, was all that Lori’s mother said.
Bombshell and Selmers were busy breeding frogs. Selmers had stopped time so that they could work for as long as possible.

“This is fun, isn’t it?”, asked Bombshell in a sarcastic tone.

“Eh, it’s not that bad. I don’t mind a break from all of the drama and fighting.”, replied Selmers.

“I guess. I’d honestly rather be kicking the shit out of Eide or something but whatever.”

“We’ll be there soon. Three of us have god tiered already. It’s only a matter of time before we’re ready.”

“I can’t wait to god tier. Your powers get so much stronger and you get to be semi-immortal, too.”

“Dying isn’t exactly easy. I hope you know that.”, Selmers warned.

“Yeah, yeah. I’ll be fine. We all have a reason to be all we can be, right? As long as I have that, I’ll go through hell to get there.”

“You’re very passionate, I’ll give you that. Just make sure you’re like that when it counts.”

“I will be. Now, let’s get back to the frogs.”

“You got it. The next one is to the south of here.”

Germ had arrived at Bea’s before Mae had. Mae took the time to gather up some stuff to bring with her. Just a few board games for the most part.

“Hey, Beabea!”, Mae greeted.

“Hi, Mae.”, Bea replied.

“Aw, you’re not gonna call me Maeday?”

“Do you want me to call you Maeday?”

“Not all the time, I was just hoping you would play along.”

“Fine. Hi, Maeday.” Mae smiled at that.

“Also, hi Germ!”

“Hi” Germ waved at Mae.

“So, what are the plans?”, asked Bea.

“I brought board games!” Mae whipped out Monopoly from her sylladex and threw it down.

“Monopoly, really?”, was Bea’s response.

“Yeah, it’ll be a true test of our friendship. Like, can we stay friends even when we’re brutally
murdering each other's hopes and dreams?!

“Yeah, no.”

“Alright, how about Sorry?”

“Do you only have the shitty board games?”

“I’m sorry my family has bad taste in family board games.”, Mae stifled her laughter at her horrid pun.

“Mae, I said you were banned from ever using puns.”

“I guess you’ll have to banish me to the Dungeon… and Dragons!” Mae held in her hands the core rulebook, the dm’s guide, and the monster manual to Dungeons and Dragons.

Bea could only facepalm and even Germ was shaking his head.

Mae laughed nervously, “I’m sorry. I’m pretty sure I get that from my dad’s side.”

“Let’s forget you said that. Also, I thought Angus was the usual dm.”, said Bea.

“Yeah, he runs games for me, Gregg, and Germ, occasionally. I wish you’d join us at least once. Give it a chance.”

“I’m not really into rpg’s.”

“Come on, let me dm for you. It’s really fun, I promise.”

“Have you ever been a dm before?”

“No, but it can’t be that hard.”

“Uh-huh, sure. I’m sure you’ll be great, going in with no experience.”

“I’ll be fine, watch. You both find yourselves in a cave with monsters in it.”

“Why are we here, exactly?”

“Uh... crap! I didn’t think that far ahead.”

Bea laughed at Mae’s failing to get past the first statement.

“Alright, fine! You’ve forced my hand! Behold, Twister!” Mae held the game in the air triumphantly.

“Y’know what? Sure. Let’s do twister.”

Mae set up the game mat on the floor and got out the spinner.

“Who’s spinning first?”, asked Mae.
“I’ll do it. I’ll just play against whoever wins.”, answered Bea.

“Alright, it’s you versus me, Germ. You are going down.”

Germ didn’t go down.

“Left hand, green.”, Bea announced.

“There’s no way you can make that. Just give up, already.” To Mae’s horror, Germ twisted his body in a way that would put contortionists to shame and he made it to the green.

“What the eff?”

“Left foot, red.”

“No way! My left leg is all of my support, right now!” Mae struggled to shift her weight but slipped and fell, causing an upheaval of her end of the board. Germ effortlessly unwound his body and stood.

“What are you, Germ?”, asked Mae.

“I’m good at twister, apparently. So, Bea, you ready?”

Bea became nervous, “Uh, how about some Monopoly? Yeah, that sounds good!”

“I second that.”, said Mae.

Germ simply shrugged and went to join for some Monopoly. It didn’t take Bea long to use her skills as a salesperson to con everyone out of their useful properties.

“Come on, anything more than a seven, please.” Mae rolled a seven. “No! Why did I give those to you?!”

“I don’t know. You tell me.”, Bea replied.

Mae was now bankrupt. She was out of the game but she knew Germ wouldn’t last much longer. Germ rolled double sixes. Sadly, this landed him on Bea’s most expensive property.

“And that’s game. There goes two hours of my life. What now”, said Bea.

“I brought my laptop. We could watch movies.”

“Okay.”

The three spent the next few hours watching movies and having a good time. When it was time to go to bed, Mae had an idea.

“Sleepover!”

“What? Did you bring a sleeping bag?”

“No. We have a bed. We can just use alchemy.”
Bea sighed, “Whatever. Two beds, coming up.” She captchalogued her bed and began the alchemy process.

“Actually, I think I’m just gonna head on home. See ya later.” Germ left before Mae had the chance to stop him.

“I guess it’s just you and me.”, said Mae.

“Good, that’s one less bed I have to make.”

Soon, the beds were both set up in Bea’s room and both of them went to lay down.

“Good night, Mae.”

“Good night.”

Mae and Bea both laid there for a few minutes but they couldn’t sleep.

Mae whispered, “Bea, are you still awake?”

“Yeah, what do you want?”

“I don’t know. I just couldn’t sleep.”

“It’s only been a few minutes.”

“Yeah, I’m normally asleep by now. You act like lying awake in bed is normal.”

“That’s because it is. Honestly, with everything you’ve been through, I’m surprised to hear that you don’t lay awake at night thinking about stuff.”

“There was a point where I couldn’t sleep without cough syrup but that changed when I got home. Even when all of the crazy stuff started happening, I was just too tired to stay awake at night. When I laid down, I fell asleep.”, Mae explained.

“I don’t know whether to envy you or feel sorry for you. As much as I would love to be able to sleep more, I don’t know if I want to be in a situation where my everyday life makes me too tired to stay awake.”

“How about neither. You have your own life to worry about. You don’t need to be worrying about mine.”

“I’m your friend, Mae. Of course, I’m going to worry about that stuff.”

“What do you think about when you go to sleep?”

“It used to be mostly about work, my parents, and my dead-end life but now it all centers around winning this game and how soon, I might be able to hope again. I also worry about everyone else. I want us all to make it, together. How many times has SBURB almost taken everything from us? I’m scared, yet the part of me that can hope is slowly coming back to me. It’s funny. Maybe I should have been a hope player.”
“Nah, I think you make a great blood player. Even if sometimes, you build a hard, outer shell around yourself, I can tell you care about all of us like family. You’re like the mom of the group. I know I use that to poke fun at you a lot but it’s actually really cool. Moms have it hard, keeping all of the children like me out of trouble and most of the time, we never give you any thanks. So, thank you.”

“If the mom is supposed to keep you out of trouble, I sure haven’t been doing a good job. You’ve died twice already right in front of me.”

“Both of those times were because I was being stupid. There wasn’t anything you could do.”

“I guess so. Please don’t do that again.”

“I won’t.”

“Alright, I think we should both go to sleep.”

“Yeah, me, too. Just focus on our life in the new world because we’re gonna make it there, I promise.”

“Good night, Maeday.”

“Good night, Beabea.”
Gregg and Lori woke up on Prospit and found each other again, ready to make the most of their time together.

“You ready?”, asked Lori as she grabbed the makeshift weapons they had from last night.

“Yes, but before we start, I wanted to tell you that this might be our last night of training together. I’m pretty sure I’ll be god tiering tomorrow.”, Gregg informed.

“We’ll just have to make the most of it, then. I want you to go all out. Use your breath powers. I need experience fighting people with more power than me.”, Lori requested.

“Are you sure? I feel like that would make the fight one-sided.”

“That’s what I want. Is our fight with Eide or the black king going to be even? No, it’s not. Now, give me everything you’ve got.” Lori was sweating nervously. She didn’t want this but she knew she needed it.

Gregg held out his hand and forcefully drained the breath from Lori. Her mind became clouded, her ideas, plans, and options fading away. Was this what it felt like to have the breath aspect taken from you? Lori ran at Gregg in an attempt to get him to stop but she had become predictable. It was almost as if Gregg knew what she would do before she did it.

Lori was trapped in a pointless cycle of swinging recklessly and Gregg blocked every shot with minimal effort. Despite her efforts, Lori couldn’t break out of it. She felt she needed to keep swinging even if it was making things worse. Slowly but surely, Lori was worn out. Gregg was surprised by her stamina. All of this energy from a teenage mouse. She seemed so desperate to win.

“Come on, what happened to all of that training? What about your aspect? Don’t you have any powers?”, Gregg questioned.

Lori stopped to catch her breath, “I don’t know how to use my power. I wish I could. I’m supposed to be the strongest of our team by the end, right? Then, why can’t I use my powers? I only want to be strong. I want to be there and I want to make a difference but I can’t because I’m a horrible page.”

Gregg saw in Lori what he had seen in himself only a few days prior. Gregg went up to Lori and sat her down.

“Look, I understand what it’s like to feel like you’re not good enough. Like, I locked myself in the Snack Falcon only a few days ago and my friends had to come and help me. They helped me understand that we all matter to each other, even if we make mistakes. No matter how much we screw up, we’re all here for each other. You may not have powers yet but I think you’re doing a fine job being a heart player. The lengths you’ll go to secure a victory are amazing. The fact that you try so hard is all we want from you and I’m sure you’ll learn to use your powers eventually. For now, let’s keep training so we can be the best we can be, alright?”

“Yeah, let’s do it.” Lori stood and readied herself again, “I still want no holding back!”

“Got it!” Gregg held out his arm again.
Lori ran again. The draining sensation hadn’t started, yet. Gregg was standing there. What was he doing? Suddenly, he seemed scared and he blocked.

“What happened?”, asked Lori.

“What are you doing?”, Gregg asked in return.

“What do you mean?”

“You’re glowing pink!”

“Huh?” Lori looked down to see herself covered in a pink aura. It was only barely visible but somehow, it was still enough to stop Gregg’s power.

“It’s your powers! It’s like you created a barrier out of your soul! Does it protect against physical attacks?” Gregg swung and it still hit Lori.

“Ow!”

“Sorry! I probably shouldn’t have swung so hard.”

The aura dissipated. “What was that?”, Lori wondered.

“Do you know how you did that?”

“No. I only remember feeling… powerful.”, the aura began to return, “Like I was finally enough.”, it grew larger and more radiant, “Like I might be able to make the change I want to see in the world.”

“Woah, I didn’t think my little pep talk would do so much.”

“I want everyone to feel like this! We all deserve to feel like this!” An aura began to form around Gregg as well and he knew what Lori meant. The aura empowered him. Slowly, his ambitions grew. The soul was like a flame. One spark had the potential to destroy entire forests. Gregg had given Lori that spark and Lori cultivated it so that it could grow into a blazing inferno. They both felt like they could do anything.

 Suddenly, the aura dispersed and Lori fell to her knees, panting.

“Woah, are you okay, dude?”, asked Gregg.

“Yeah, I think I pushed it too far. That felt amazing.”

“Yeah, it did! You’re amazing, dude! When you god tier, I bet you could rally entire armies with that power!”

“You really think so?”

“Of course!”

“Y’know, I’m actually kinda sad that you won’t be here tomorrow. I hope I reach god tier soon.”
“I’m sure you will. That was a huge step in the right direction. You’ll be there in no time.”

They both sat there for a while, staring at the black sky and talking.

“You wanna have one last showdown?”, asked Gregg.

“Let’s go.”, Lori replied.

They both stood. Lori created the aura once more, on a much smaller scale and Gregg, knowing he couldn’t penetrate Lori’s soul with his rogue powers, began taking breath in small amounts from the people that were still on Prospit. It wasn’t much but he would take anything he could get. They steeled themselves and ran together to fight, one last time.

Mae awoke in her room again. She went downstairs and saw Mae lying on the couch.

“It’s about time you woke up.”, said dead Mae.

“Well, a lot happened today.”

“I can tell. You have your god tier costume. Now the only way people can tell us apart is our eyes.”

“I’m still not used to seeing that. It’s so weird only seeing the whites of your eyes. It makes you look evil or possessed or something.”

“I was both of those things so I guess you’re not too far off.”

“I know, I was, too.”

“Everyone except for me has plans, right now. Wanna go do something?”

“What did you have in mind?”

“Come on, I’ll show you.” The dead Mae stood and motioned for Mae to come outside with her. They both climbed up the tree Mae uses to get on the powerlines. When they were both up, dead Mae said, “I’ll race ya to the other side of town.”

“Oh, you’re on!” They both took a separate cord and prepared to race.

“Hey, Mae!” It was Bea.

“Hi, Bea!”

“What’re you doing?”

“We’re gonna race across the rooftops!”

“Don’t fall. It’d be embarrassing if that’s how you died.”

“What would even happen if we died here?”, Mae asked.

“Let’s not find out, okay?”, Bea requested.
“Don’t worry, I won’t fall. Besides, if I do fall, the snow will cushion my fall.”

“Just don’t fall.”

“Got it!”

The other Mae began a countdown, “3, 2, 1, Go!”

Both Maes speed-walked across the power lines as fast as they could. Neither one could get ahead. They reached the first roof together and started running. They manage to stay side-by-side for a good while until they reach the Snack Falcon. They both jumped to try to reach it but dead Mae slipped and fell to the ground. The fall wasn’t too bad but it left her behind normal Mae. Normal Mae runs all the way to the fence where she first chased Eide with the other Mae right on her tail but she still won.

“What was that jump? I thought you were supposed to be me. Stop giving me a bad name.”, said Mae when she won.

“In my defense, I haven’t had a good run in a while. I have been dead for a while.”

“You’re the one who wanted to race.”

Bea caught up with them and asked, “So, who won?”

Mae began to gloat, “Of course, it was me. I am the superior Mae, clearly.”

The other Mae simply crossed her arms and pouted. Germ then appeared from the woods beyond the fence.

“Hi, Germ.”, Mae greeted.

“Hi.”

Mae turned to her other self, “Do you know where your Germ is?”

“Not really.”, she replied.

“He’s at our house.”, said Germ.

“You already met him.”, asked Mae.

“Yeah. He’s cool.”

“I was kinda hoping you would have more of a reaction to seeing a version of yourself that died.”

“I died. That’s why I have this outfit.”

“Yeah, but he died and didn’t come back. Doesn’t that freak you out even a little?”

Germ shrugged. Angus arrived with Selmers.
“Hey, Angus. Hey, Selmers. How did you know we were here?”, Mae questioned.

“We saw you running along the rooftops. Then, one of you fell so we came to make sure you were okay.”, Angus answered.

“We’re fine. So, now that we’re all here, what’s the plan for tonight? Are we doing anything important or are we just messing around until we get tired?”

“There’s not a whole lot of important stuff to do here so I guess we just mess around for the night.”

“I actually have a question for my other self.”, said Mae.

“Ask away.”

“Do you sleep, like, at all?”

“None of us need to sleep anymore. Why do you think we let you sleep in our beds?”

“Hospitality?”

“No. We let you sleep in our beds because we don’t need them.”

“I find it sad that I’m immortal yet I still need sleep. What’s up with that?”

“Don’t ask me. If anything, you should ask John.”

“What do you think happened to your John?”

“He’s probably continuing to live life in his new universe and helping other universes get through their sessions. They have, like, a whole department dedicated to helping people not screw up their sessions.”

“Woah, that’s crazy! How many sessions are there?”

“Infinite universes, infinite SBURB sessions. They’re only trying to help as many people as possible. We should be incredibly grateful that we were one of the almost zero percent of universes that are receiving his help. Without him, we’d all have died before the game started because we didn’t get physical copies of the game.”

“Wow.”

“Make sure you don’t waste this opportunity like we did, okay?”

“We won’t.”

Bombshell woke up inside Derse again and sighed. She didn’t know what to do. It was boring being stuck in the center of a planet every night. That was when she felt a wave of distortion in spacetime. She dug up to the surface as fast as she could and looked into the furthest ring. Eide was there next to an unconscious Selmers. He had broken out of her time travel before they reached their destination.

Eide was preparing to kill Selmers but Bombshell wouldn’t let him. She still had a real self to go
back to. She tore a metal pole from one of the fences in front of her house and flew to help Selmers.

“What was that?”, asked Mae.

“Oh no.”, Selmers muttered before flying off.

Everyone else followed to see what was happening. They reached the edge of the dream bubble and looked out to see Eide about to kill the Selmers that had come back to take him to the future.

Selmers was panicking and trying to break through the bubble, “We can’t let her die! If she dies, the loop won’t be complete! We’ll be screwed! We’d be in a doomed timeline! No!”

Everyone was horrified to hear this. Selmers was all alone out there and she was unconscious. She couldn’t even fight back. Then, out of nowhere, Bombshell flew in and attempted to hit Eide with a metal pole.

“Yes, Bombshell!”, Mae cheered!

“What? There’s no way she can fight Eide!”, yelled Selmers.

Angus stepped in, “Selmers, can’t you just have more time clones come in to help?"

“Using time clones in a fight against someone like Eide is extremely risky. If one of them dies, it’ll cause all sorts of problems. I only used it that one time out of desperation and look where that got us.”

“Still, we need to protect the one that’s unconscious. What if you sent one to get her out of there until she wakes up. If Bombshell dies, she’ll just wake up. It’s best if we don’t risk losing the session over that.”, Angus recommended.

“We can’t just let her die!”, Mae yelled.

“If Bombshell went into that fight actually thinking she could win, she’s just ignorant. She probably knew she would die and only did it because she understood the implications of Selmers dying.”

“Damn it! I wish we could do something!” A time clone came and took the unconscious Selmers away, leaving Bombshell to fight Eide.

“Wait, what if we used our god powers? We might be able to bring Eide into submission if we steal his rage!”, dead Mae suggested.

“If you do that, I might be able to stall him for a little while. I could consume him with the void if he doesn’t fight back. He would break out eventually, though.”, added Germ.

“Let’s do it!”, said Mae as she began to slowly drain Eide’s rage. Soon, the other Mae joined in, too while Germ waited for the opportune moment to strike. Bea also added to the Maes’ power by strengthening the bond they shared.

Eide laughed at Bombshell’s attempt to attack him, “Really? You thought you could stop me, a god, with some pole you found lying on the ground? That’s actually pretty sad.”
“Yeah, I’m not exactly proud of myself, either. I just came to stop you from ruining our session.”

“Well, I guess that’s understandable. You know what? I’ll make your first death quick but first, I’m gonna kill Selmers.”

“I thought you said you needed us alive.”

“Nice try, this is a time clone.”

“If you kill her, this session will be doomed!”

“That doesn’t concern me. I won’t be in this session when it dies and you won’t, either.

“What do you mean you won’t be in this session. You’re immortal and there’s no way you can travel through the furthest ring by yourself.”

“That’s where you’re wrong but let’s not go into too much more detail. I wouldn’t want to spoil the surprise.”

“I’m still not letting you kill Selmers.”

Then, another time clone appeared and flew away with Selmers.

“Wait!”, yelled Eide as he flew after them.

Bombshell cut him off, “I’m sorry, I can’t let you leave.”

Eide growled for a moment before calming down, “Fine, you can have her. It won’t matter in the long run. Now it’s just you and me. I could let you go on one condition. Tell me where the other ring is.”

“That’s not happening.”

“Then, I guess you’re going to need to die.” He prepared to kill Bombshell but something was off. He felt strange. He almost didn’t feel like fighting. He shoved those feelings aside and fired a beam at Bombshell, which she dodged. Eide wasn’t at the top of his game. He kept attacking and missing. He was slowing down.

“What’s going on? Why do I feel unmotivated? I should want to kill her, right?”

Look behind you, at the bubble.

“Wha-“ He then saw it. Two Maes stealing his anger from him.

A new wave of rage washed over Eide, “How dare you?!“ He flew towards the bubble. He saw Germ say something and just as he was about to enter the bubble, a large tentacle wrapped around him. Germ had commanded one of the horrotters to trap him.

Now that Eide was closer, the Maes were able to steal his rage at a much faster rate. Soon, Eide became despondent. Germ then waved the horrotter away and let the void blanket over Eide, trapping him, at least for now.
Bombshell flew up to the bubble, “Wow, is this the dream bubble?”

“Yeah, can you get in?”, asked Mae.

Bombshell was able to enter the bubble without resistance.

“So, this is what Possum Springs is like.” She looked down at the town. “It’s not exactly high-class but it seems nice.”

“Please, any town without abandoned buildings everywhere looks nice. We only have a few abandoned buildings. Trust me, it was a dying town before SBURB.”, said Mae.

“Now it’s really dead.”, added the other Mae. No one laughed.

“Would it be possible for me to stay here as my dream-self? Derse is so boring now that I’m all alone.”, Bombshell requested.

“I don’t see why not. We have extra beds.”, answered dead Mae.

“Cool.”

“We still have a few hours before we wake up. We should all go do something fun.”, Mae suggested.

“And what would that be?”, asked Bea.

“Let’s go see if we can’t get all of the others to join us before we decide.”

Lori made a quick jab with her weapon which Gregg parried with his left dagger and he thrust with his right. Lori dodged to the side and again backward. She tried to keep out of Gregg’s range while staying within range so that she could attack. Gregg saw this and became more aggressive, pushing Lori back with a flurry of blows. At the end, he blasted Lori with a gust of wind before lunging forward and thrusting with both daggers. Lori flew over the attack and flew down with a downward swing. Gregg pushed her back with more wind.

Soon, Gregg had joined Lori in the air and they traded blows back and forth. Lori knew she could make this a battle of stamina. Lori could create her aspect and empower herself with it while Gregg had to get his power from others. In most battles, that wouldn’t matter but with Lori, her soul had enough strength to resist Gregg’s rogue powers. He had managed to steal some from the prospitans that were left on Prospit but that would run out while Lori could always supply her soul with power. Of course, Gregg’s power could be used to attack while Lori’s could only be used to buff herself or teammates so it balanced itself out.

As the fight drew on, Lori began to feel more and more exhilarated. Her aura began to grow and her attacks became more relentless. Gregg was being overwhelmed and forced to use his wind powers to avoid being struck down multiple times. Lori’s sword fighting skills had improved drastically since she started training and it showed.

Gregg suddenly had an idea. He only had a little bit of breath left to use so he had to make this count. When he got the chance, he gave the breath to Lori. Lori felt her spirits lift and was confused. Gregg took the chance and struck while she was caught off guard. He touched the tip of his weapon to Lori’s throat before she could react.
“You’re dead.”, declared Gregg pridefully.

Lori’s aura dispersed, “What? How did I let that happen?”

“Pretty smart, right? I gave you the last of my breath to confuse you and I attacked. That was still a great fight, dude. Definitely worthy of our final fight together. Keep going and god tier. Maybe when we enter the new universe, we can do this again. For now, let’s go to sleep.”

“Yeah, goodbye. I guess the next time I’ll see you will either be in a dream bubble after I god tier or on Skaia. Either way, I’ll look forward to it.”

They waved to each other as they left to go to sleep. Lori was glad she’d gotten the chance to fight with Gregg. She had finally gotten control of her power thanks to him and she was eternally grateful. Gregg had also obtained some good battle experience with an opponent who forced him to do more than swing randomly and dodge or block. He needed to strategize while still keeping on his toes. It was a hard but necessary skill to learn. In the end, this had greatly benefitted both of them.

“Snowball fight!”, Mae yelled. She had gathered everyone up for a fun group activity. She made a snowball and threw it at the other Mae.

“It’s on!”, she replied as she prepared her own snowball to throw back.

“Woohoo!”, cheered Gregg. He threw his first snowball at one of the Beas.

“What the hell?!”, responded Bea.

The other Bea walked up to her, “We’re not gonna let him get away with that, are we?” She held a snowball in her hand.

“No, no we aren’t.” They both had snowballs ready to throw.

Gregg ran and hid behind his Angus, “Protect me, cap’n!”

“You got it, bug.”, he made his own snowball and threw it, hitting the living Bea in the face.

That Bea laughed, “You little shit. You’re going down first.” She threw her snowball and hit Angus in the chest followed by the other Bea throwing hers and hitting him in the stomach.

“Oh, no. They got me. Avenge me, bug.”, Angus acted as he fell back.

Gregg went along with his act, “Nooooo! I’ll avenge you, cap’n!” He had been making snowballs while he hid and he began throwing them at the Beas. The living Angus joined in to help.

While they were fighting, both Maes were raining frozen fury down upon each other. Both Bombshells began helping their respective Maes. The Selmers’ were teaming up to take on everyone. They didn’t care who they hit as long as they were hitting someone. Lori went to help her Mae in her fight against the living Mae.

The Germs got together and came up with an idea. They created a giant snowball while everyone else was preoccupied. One of them flew it over the battlefield and dropped on the other, who
punched it, causing it to explode and drop snow on everyone.

Everyone looked up to see where the snowfall had come from and when they saw the Germs, they all banded together to take them both down. They all brought snowballs up with them and started bombarding them with snow. Bombshell took a snowball and threw it, increasing its size as it flew. When it hit one of the Germs, it was almost as big as him and it knocked him down onto one of the nearby buildings. The other Germ attempted an escape but Selmers held him down with her time powers. Everyone threw snowballs at him at the same time and both Germs surrendered.

After that, the fighting calmed down. Everyone had their fun but it was nearing time for the those who were still alive to go to sleep.

Mae yawned, “I think it’s about time we got to sleep. We’re getting close. Only three more gates and the final battle of Skaia. That means we’re about half-way done!”

“Yeah but I feel like Eide’s going to be a problem again and I bet he knows we’re getting close, too. He’ll probably start trying harder.”, said Bea.

“We have three god tiers now, we’ll be fine.”

“Just remember you’re only semi-immortal and you can still die. I’m saying this mostly to you because you tend to be impulsive and spontaneous like that time you thought it was a good idea to fly directly into the Derse royal castle without a plan and you died.”

“I’ll be fine. Don’t worry about it.”

“I thought I was the mom of the group, isn’t it my job to worry about it?”

“Yeah, whatever, let’s just go to sleep.”

Everyone agreed and went their separate ways. Soon, they were all awake.

MB: That was one heck of a night!

GL: What happened?

MB: Eide’s back.

GL: What?! What happened to Selmers?

SF: That bastard broke out of my time travel. He almost ruined our timeline by trying to kill the time clone. What sucks is now, I know that has to happen to me in order for the loop to be complete.

GL: Where is he now?

MB: Germ trapped him in the void. It’s only temporary but it’ll work for now.

GW: We should make a plan. The void will only keep someone as powerful as him trapped for a short period of time. I’d say we have until tonight to prepare.

GT: Is there enough time for a gate?
GW: No. If we do a gate, we won’t have enough time to make it back to the furthest ring to confront him.

BS: Why are we confronting him, exactly?

GT: The longer he’s allowed to roam freely in the session, the more chance there is of him screwing up everything.

BS: How would we even kill him?

GT: We can’t, at least not to my knowledge but we can steal the ring.

BS: Last time we tried that, it didn’t go so well. What will be different this time?

GT: We’ll have more god tiers, for one. Jack is also on our side. If we can convince him to fight Eide with the second ring, I think we’ve got a great chance to succeed.

BS: Fine, when should we leave?

GW: Everyone should be ready in about three hours.

GT: Alright, everyone, go do what you can in three hours. If anyone else thinks they can god tier, do it.

BS: I think I can god tier but I could only god tier on Derse.

GT: It’ll have to wait until we go to sleep. There’s not enough time for you to find your way to the center without Bombshell.

Bs: What if I went with her? I’m not gonna god tier today, anyway.

GT: Are you sure? You could spend this time powering yourself up.

Bs: Having Bea as a god tier would be more useful in my opinion. I doubt no one’s getting injured during this fight. It’d be great if we had a god tier healer.

GT: Alright then, how close is Bea to the top of her echeladder?

BS: I think I can reach it in about half an hour.

GT: Good enough. Get started. Bombshell, you can grind or whatever for half an hour and then go straight to Bea’s. You’ll both go to Derse at top speed and Bea will god tier while Bombshell flies the ship back to Bea’s. By then, three hours will have passed and everyone else will meet there to go and confront Eide.

GL: I’ll be able to god tier, too.

GT: Good, every god tier helps. If that’s all, everyone should get going.

Everyone went off to do whatever they felt they needed to be prepared to confront Eide again. This felt like déjà vu to them. They were going back to the furthest ring to steal Eide’s ring again. They
hoped it would go better than last time.

Bea rushed to kill things as fast as possible. She acted recklessly on purpose so that she would have more of her own injuries to heal. After about twenty minutes, she had finished. She messaged Bombshell that she was ready and went to where she kept the ship. Bombshell arrived soon after. They got in the airship and flew to Derse. It took about an hour with them coming close to overheating the engines several times.

Just like last time, guards were there to intercept the ship and Bea was forced to fight them off. Bae wished she had chosen something better than a knife as her weapon. She was still able to kill a few dozen soldiers before Bombshell reached the center of Derse. Hopefully, this would be the last time they had to come here. Bombshell could god tier normally and there were no longer any dream selves on the planet.

Bea flew to the center and asked Bombshell to kill her. Bombshell agreed and decapitated her with her laser sword. Soon, the body began to glow just like Mae’s and it disappeared, leaving a large bloodstain on the slab. The glow from Skaia appeared again and Bea ascended to god tier.

Bea woke up and took the opportunity to regain her bearings. She noticed she had new clothes. It was a brown dress with a slash mark on her chest, symbolizing the blood aspect. Bea would’ve preferred if the dress wasn’t brown but at least it wasn’t a bard costume like Germ’s. She found where her planet was and flew in its direction.

Gregg was taking longer to reach the top of his echeladder. He was further behind than Bea so he had to work harder to get there. At least he didn’t need to go to Prospit so he could take longer if he needed to. It took Gregg about two hours to finally reach the top. He rushed to find his quest bed.

When Gregg reached his bed, Angus was there.

“What are you doing here?”, asked Gregg.

“I came to grab your stuff and take it to Bea’s. I want you to head straight there once you wake up. I also came to kill you. If I do it, it’ll hurt less than if you stabbed yourself.”

“Wow, thanks.”

“No problem. Are you ready?”

“Aye aye, cap’n.” Gregg saluted like a sailor to hide the fact that he was terrified and gave Angus his equipment. He hadn’t died yet. It scared him to think of what it would be like. Angus brought out a new pair of wands he had made. This pair pulsated with Angus’ magic in a vine-like pattern. Before Gregg could comment on them, Angus shot him through the head with a magic beam. It pained Angus to see Gregg lying dead on the floor but he knew this was a necessary evil. Gregg’s body began to glow until it disappeared. Once more, a bright light shone from Skaia as Gregg was resurrected as a god tier.

Gregg looked down and examined his clothes. They were a vibrant blue with a light blue breath symbol on his chest. He had a mask covering his eyes and a hood, which he chose to keep down because it covered his ears. Overall, he liked his new look and they were very comfortable like Germ had said. After examining the god tier clothes, he flew toward Bea’s planet.
After Mae saw the second god tier, she decided to try and alchemize a new weapon, preferably one that wasn’t a fire hazard. She took her Witchbane and a copy of her laptop to see if she could get some cool sci-fi bat or something. This combination created the Occultist’s Thunder. Mae assumed that meant it shocked things, which it did. After about a half an hour of testing, she flew off to meet at Bea’s house.

Lori did some more training with her mother. Her mother was pleasantly surprised with her recent developments of her heart powers. Now, Lori was able to last much longer in a fight against her. Lori even had her use her sprite powers against her so that she could practice fighting against them. As Lori prepared to leave, her mother stopped her and gave her the same medallion that Mae had. It could summon her from anywhere to help fight.

Selmers created a new gun by combining her laser rifle and Lunar Lance. This new weapon, called the Eclipse Cannon, fired a large, constant beam that devastated anything in its path. Selmers grinded for a bit to get used to the new weapon before leaving for Bea’s.

Once everyone had gathered at Bea’s house, they exchanged a few words, grabbed Jack, and got on the ship to leave. They began their journey to the furthest ring.

“Aw, man, Gregg and Bea are god tiers now!”, Mae exclaimed.

“Well yeah, dude! This costume is sick!”, Gregg replied.

“Mine could be better.”, said Bea.

“I do kind of miss my leather jacket, though.”

“You’ll get it back once we’re in the new world. For now, just be happy with your awesome costume and Bea, your costume is cool, too.”, Mae assured.

“Thanks. At least you think so.”, Bea responded.

“I know so!”

Angus butted in, “So, what’s the plan?”

“So far, the plan is just to take the ring back. We’ll give Jack our ring…”, Bea took out the ring, “…and he’ll help us, at least I hope he will.” Bea looked over to Jack and extended the ring out to him. He begrudgingly accepted it and agreed to help.

“Okay, what do we do after we have both rings?”, Angus asked.

“We keep them from Eide until the end of the game.”, Bea answered.

“What happens when we beat the game. No doubt he’ll have access to the new world. He is technically Gregg’s sprite, after all.”

No one knew how to answer that.

Mae unsatisfyingly replied, “I guess we’ll just have to figure it out when we get there.”

Angus wasn’t exactly happy with this response but he honestly didn’t know what he was expecting.
He knew none of them knew. His mind powers had made that clear. Part of him had hoped that asking would spark someone to realize an answer but it hadn’t.

“Well’ll kill him. We have to… For Casey.”, said Gregg.

Lori felt it was a good time to give everyone a morale boost. Suddenly, everyone felt a little happier. They noticed Lori’s aura.

“Woah, you have powers, now?!”, Mae questioned.

“Yeah. Everyone seemed a bit tense after that last question so I thought I’d lighten the mood a bit.”

“So, that’s what I felt just now.”, said Angus.

“Oh, yeah, we didn’t tell you guys yet. While me and Lori were training on Prospit, Lori discovered how to use her powers. It’s not much now but she’s a page so it’ll get so much stronger when she god tiers!”, Gregg explained.

“Is this the extent of your power or could you push it further?”, asked Angus.

“At this level, I can keep it up for long periods of time but I can go higher, it’ll just burn me out quicker.”

“It felt amazing when she went all out! I felt like I could do anything and her aura was so much bigger than mine! I can only imagine what it felt like to be her!”, Gregg added.

“I felt like I was on top of the world. I would give anything to feel that again but I know I can’t right now. I need to be at the top of my game for this fight. I’ll still give you what I can, though.”

“We’re almost there, get ready.”, Bea announced.

Everyone began to mentally prepare themselves for the upcoming fight. A few minutes later, they were in the furthest ring. They could see the dream bubble they were in earlier and they waved to them. Turns out, they arrived just in time to see a rift open in the furthest ring as Eide crawled his way out of the void, filled with earth-shattering rage. For a moment, he and the group locked eyes. Everyone felt shivers run down their spines in the face of Eide’s abhorrent expression. Suddenly, no one was sure they were truly ready for what would happen next.
Chapter 11

Everyone exited the ship when they saw Eide charge at them with an ethereal sword. Jack put on his ring and attacked Eide with his own blade. Lori bolstered everyone’s soul and performed Anima Ensemble with Bea to amplify the effect. Mae and Gregg were busy draining Eide’s rage and breath respectively. It didn’t seem to affect Eide, though. His emotions were overwhelming and it would take forever to steal all of it. All of this anger was mostly directed towards Jack. He still wanted the second ring and he would go to any lengths to obtain it.

Bea had been strengthening everyone’s bond and Gregg began to distribute his breath to everyone. With this myriad of buffs, the group’s effectiveness increased drastically. Selmers and Bombshell performed Adagio Redshift, greatly damaging Eide by creating a distortion in spacetime around him. Germ used Null Drone, a fraymotif in which the void begins to assault Eide with an unseen force.

Mae flew in to help Jack double team Eide. If Eide dodged or blocked one of them, the other was there to attack instead. Eide teleported behind Jack and tried to stab him but Bombshell was there to deflect the blow.

“You! I can kill you! You still have a dream-self!” Eide made a strong thrust at Bombshell, who dodged but still got left with a large gash in her side. Gregg came in and blasted Eide away with a large gust of wind before grabbing Bombshell and bringing her to Bea, who began healing her. Gregg called out to Selmers for them to use their fraymotif, Tremolo Squall. Gregg blasted Eide with a gust of wind and Selmers used her time powers to repeat the gust multiple times in rapid succession.

Jack was once again attacking Eide while Mae fell back to steal more rage. Angus began firing magic at Eide and Lori went to help Jack. Her Spirit Chain whirred with spectral energy that caused Eide great pain when it landed. Eide attempted to kill her, knowing she, too, had a dream self to fall back on and that killing her here would remove her from the battle. Lori, however seemed to know every trick Eide had up his sleeve. She knew about his sprite powers and he couldn’t beat her in a melee battle.

With Lori, Mae and Jack both assaulting Eide along with Angus’ magic attacks, Eide was being driven back. Mae also joined back in. Eide could teleport but so could Jack. By this point, Bombshell was fully healed and she was on Eide as well. Angus was finding it harder and harder to find openings to hit Eide with magic without hitting anyone else. Selmers had it even worse because she couldn’t read everyone’s minds to see what they would do next. She attempted a time stop but Eide knew how to break out of it now so it didn’t do much.

Gregg joined the fight with Eide and now, there were five people on one. Eide was teleporting constantly to get out of the way but Jack was always there to meet him. At one point, Eide had tried to teleport to Prospit but Jack went there and grabbed him, teleporting back. Jack then held onto Eide and cut off his arm, which faded out of existence due to being separated from Eide’s body, leaving the ring floating in space for Jack to grab. Everyone cheered.

Their joy would be short-lived. A black, smoke-like substance flew out of Eide’s body and forced its way into Jack.
Eide was screaming, “No! Don’t leave me! I’ll do better, I swear!” He reached out to Jack, who had now become despondent. Everyone tried to get him to answer them but he wouldn’t respond. Slowly, Jack began to put on the ring.

Angus realized what was happening and yelled, “Don’t let him put on the ring! Stop him!”

Everyone charged at him but it was too late. He put on the ring and a massive shockwave of energy exploded outward, knocking everyone back.

“What are you doing?!”, asked Bea.

Jack said nothing and teleported in front of Bea, stabbing her in the chest.

“NO!”, Mae screamed. Her anger swelled, “Lori, Gregg, give me everything you’ve got. No holding back!”

“Mae, Bea’s gonna be fine. That wasn’t a heroic death, we need to leave before-“, Gregg was cut off.

“I don’t care! He’s not getting away with this! He betrayed us and he has to pay! Now, give me your power!” Gregg and Lori complied, knowing that Mae would still fight regardless.

Mae was engulfed by a sea of emotions as she charged Jack from behind. Jack turned around and clashed with Mae. Crackling was heard from Mae’s weapon as it came into contact with Jack’s sword at full force. Mae pulled her bat back and swung again and was once again blocked by Jack. This was repeated multiple times as Mae desperately attempted to kill Jack.

“We have to help her!”, Gregg exclaimed.

“Gregg, no, if you help her and die, you won’t come back!”, Angus argued.

“She’s going to die if we don’t do something!”

“I’ll go. I still have a dream self. You can bring me back if I die.”, said Lori.

“If you’re helping, so am I.”, added Bombshell.

Before anyone could protest, they both joined Mae.

“What are you doing?! Get out of here! This is my fight!”, Mae demanded.

“What are you talking about? This is our fight, too! We want Jack dead just as much as you!”, Lori replied.

“Yeah, let’s kick his ass together!”, added Bombshell.

“You’d better not die!”, said Mae.

Angus, Selmers, Gregg, and Germ gave what help they could from a distance. Jack, however, was exponentially more powerful than before. No one could even come close to hitting Jack except for Mae. Gregg and Angus attempted a Paramour Phrase but all it seemed to do was annoy Jack. Eventually, Mae was able to get in a jab with the tip of her bat into Jack’s stomach. Jack was
unfazed by this attack and he went to stab Mae when Bombshell hit him in the back with her sword. Jack swung back and created a deep cut across her abdomen.

Mae screamed and swung the bat in Jack’s face as hard as she could, her anger drowning out all other thoughts. This time, Jack actually reeled back but Mae wasn’t about to let up. She swung wildly, not giving Jack a chance to recover between blows. Lori was next to Bombshell, who was bleeding profusely. Bea still wasn’t awake so they had no way of properly healing her. Lori was attempting to hold the wound shut but she could only watch in despair as the life exited Bombshell’s body. She checked for a pulse but there was none. Lori immediately kissed Bombshell to bring her dream-self to life.

Bea’s body glowed and her wound closed. She awoke just in time to see Lori kissing Bombshell. She also saw Mae beating Jack with her bat.

“Good, you’re awake.”, Angus greeted. “We need to get out of here.”

“What about Mae and Bombshell?”

“Bombshell should be here any minute. Her dream-self is in the dream bubble right behind us and Mae should calm down once she realizes you’re awake.”

“Can we even escape Jack? He has both rings. If we run, he’ll kill us.”

“I have an idea.”, said Selmers. “Germ and I have a special fraymotif. It’s called Ephemeral Opus. With it, we can trap Jack in a space where time doesn’t exist. Unfortunately, due to the instability of a space like that, it’ll break down eventually and he’ll exit at a random point in time. We can’t decide where it’ll take him and we can only perform it on him once.”

“Right now, it seems like our only option. Do it.”, agreed Angus.

“We need Mae to get away from Jack. It’s not exactly pinpoint accurate and we wouldn’t want her to be pulled in.”

Bea yelled, “Mae, I’m fine! You need to get away from him! We have a plan!”

Mae stopped her assault and looked at Bea. She only barely noticed Jack trying to stab her and she blocked it. After that, she flew away. Jack gave chase, showing no signs of being injured by Mae’s attacks, but was cut off by Selmers and Germ’s fraymotif. A rift wrapped around him and pulled him into the timeless space.

For a moment, everyone floated in silence in space recovering from what had just transpired. Bombshell’s dream-self appeared after waking up in the dream bubble and rushing out to see what happened. Mae saw her and smiled.

“Where’s Jack?”, Bombshell asked.

“He hopefully won’t be bothering us anytime soon.”, replied Selmers.

“What about Eide?”

Eide was nowhere to be found. He had escaped while Jack kept everyone occupied.
“Damn it!”, growled Mae.

“Let’s not worry about that right now. He’s powerless without the black goat or the rings. Let’s just go home and we can figure everything out later, okay?”, Bea suggested.

“Fine.”

The ride home was a quiet one. Everyone contemplated what today’s events meant for the rest of the game. Jack had the potential to destroy everything they had worked for and all it would take was a stroke of bad luck with Selmers and Germ’s fraymotif. Sure, Eide was out of the picture but now, there was an exceptionally larger threat to deal with.

After a long period of silence, Gregg spoke up, “So, what are we gonna do?”

Angus replied, “We complete our gates, we kill our denizens, we kill the black king, we beat the game. Same plan as always.”

“You know that’s not what I meant. What do we do about Jack?”

“I don’t know, okay? I’m trying to think of a solution.” Angus was beginning to raise his voice, struggling not to let his weakness show. Gregg backed down from his line of questioning.

“I think Lori might be our best shot.”, stated Bea.

“M-me?” Lori was caught off guard by Bea’s suggestion.

“It’s a possibility. You’re the page. Once you god tier, you’re supposed to be the most powerful class. I bet that with that power, you could buff Mae to a point where she actually stood a chance. If we all focus our powers onto Mae and she fully utilizes her rage powers, we might be able to beat him.”

Mae was slightly skeptical, “I don’t know. I beat Jack pretty hard back there and he just shrugged it off like it was no big deal.”

“Just make better gear, then.”, Bea advised.

“I don’t know what else to alchemize with.”

“What about you’re bass?”

“Would that really make a good weapon?”

“I don’t know. Just try it. Alchemy is about experimentation. We’ll never know for sure how far we can take the alchemy system until we push the boundaries ourselves.”

Gregg turned to Angus, “Can you send me the code for my guitar? I’m sure I could make some cool stuff with that.”

“Sure.”

The rest of the ride was spent in silence and eventually, they made it to Bea’s house. Everyone said their goodbyes and went to spend the rest of their day trying to find something to do.
Mae decided to start pushing the limits of alchemy like Bea said. She combined her Occultist’s Thunder with her bass and created the Booming Surge. Mae fought off the urge to immediately test it so that she could combine more stuff. An idea came to her. What if you used the legendary god tier clothes to alchemize. She created a copy of them, which was surprisingly cheap, and looked to see what would happen if she combined it with her original bat.

“Holy shit! That’s expensive!”, Mae exclaimed when she saw the price of creating the Indignation Slugger. There was no way a weapon that costs this much can’t be legendary. There were four types of grist she hadn’t even seen yet in the cost list.

MB: Guys, everyone who has a god tier costume needs to try combining it with their starting weapon! It is so expensive! These have to be legendary!

GL: Holy shit, dude! When I do that it creates two daggers and one is longer than the other. They’re called the Tempest Blades.

BS: Mine’s called Bloodletter.

SF: I get a sniper rifle called the Aeon Marksman.

GW: Null Bombs. Not sure what they do but they sound cool I guess.

MB: My weapon is the Indignation Slugger.

GL: Nice!

GT: That’s actually very interesting. None of us ever thought to use our god tier costumes in alchemy.

AD: Do you think it’ll be powerful enough to stop Jack?

MB: I don’t know. We don’t exactly get weapon stats in alchemy.

GT: Honestly speaking, I’m not sure if beating Jack is possible. We never had someone wear both rings in our session. Our Jack only had one ring and he was only defeated by someone else with the other ring.

MB: That’s not exactly what I wanted to hear

AD: I doubt we’ll beat Jack using sheer force. We need to steal one of the rings.

MB: We’ve tried stealing the rings twice now and we’ve failed both times. I think we should stop trying to steal the rings from end-game bosses when we haven’t even completed the fifth gate yet.

AD: The hope is he won’t be back until we complete the game but we can’t be sure of that. We need a plan for if he comes back early.

MB: What can we do? He can teleport at will and he has godly reflexes. How do you think we can steal a ring from him? It won’t be possible unless we’re more powerful.

GT: I forgot to mention this but there are actually multiple god tiers that basically act like a second
echeladder. They take much longer to climb, though. Each tier is a big achievement.

AD: I’ll be able to god tier tomorrow if we do our fifth gates.

Bs: Same, here.

LM: I don’t know about tomorrow. Maybe after the sixth gate?

GT: If that’s the case, everyone should be god tier by the time they reach their denizen. That means we can start the final battle as soon as everyone defeats their denizen. Bombshell can bring the genesis frog with her so that when you kill the black king and hopefully Eide and Jack.

MB: Will that be enough? Also, if he does become free early, what do we do?

GT: Actually, I might have an idea. Let me get Dave in here.

TG: ‘Sup, Egbert?

GT: I was wondering if you still had the code for the Deringer?

TG: No, but I can go get it, brb.

TG: I’m back. What do you even need it for?

GT: I want to send it to these people because they really screwed up.

TG: What did they do?

GT: Jack has both rings.

TG: Jesus, how do you even manage to screw up that bad? You guys would be fucked if I weren’t here.

MB: What does the Deringer do?

TG: It de-rings people, obviously. Can you even read?

MB: Yes, I can read. I just didn’t think the name would be so literal.

TG: We are giving it to you because you need to get the rings back. What else would it do?

MB: I don’t know, maybe it’s super powerful or something.

TG: Don’t get me wrong, it’s a damn good sword. I just doubt any amount of powerful, legendary weapons is going to stop Jack if he has both rings.

Bs: I guess I’ll be wielding it, then. How do I use it?

TG: Just aim for their fingers. It should cut right through.

Bs: Cool. Thanks.

GT: Bye, Dave.

MB: Yay! There’s still hope!

AD: Can you make the sword now?

Bs: Yes, actually. It looks really cool. I bet it’s better than my laser sword.

GT: Alright, things are looking up. I think that’s a good place to call it a day.

MB: Alchemy is cool! I’m gonna go mess around with it some more.

AD: It would probably be a good idea if everyone did that. We need to gear up for the future.

SF: I’ll go max out everyone’s grist caches.

BS: Sounds like a plan.

It was time for everyone to get an upgrade. Angus already had a high-level pair of wands he created earlier called the Diabolist Veins. His magic could be seen pulsing through vein-like patterns in the wand.

Gregg decided to get creative with his alchemy. He already had a fire dagger. What if he combined it with an ice dagger? He created an ice dagger using ice from the ice cream freezer in the Snack Falcon and his dagger. Combining them created a pair of daggers. One was made of a blue metal and was imbued with ice magic and the other was made of a red metal and had fire magic. The pair was called Feu et Glace, which translated to fire and ice from French.

Bea was thinking about how to push the limits of alchemy and she had an idea. She took a knife and made a cut in her finger. She let the blood drip onto a small piece of paper and went to see what she could create. When she combined it with her knife, she got the Crimson Splicer. It seemed to be a weaker version of the bloodletter but it was much cheaper. She created one and found she could manipulate it with her blood powers. Bea saw a golden opportunity and created more knives. She could create five knives total with her available grist. She could control all five of them and still use her Abyssal Incisor. This was a massive upgrade to her arsenal.

Lori pondered what to do with her available supplies. What could she combine with her machete to make a more powerful weapon? After some thought, Lori decided that armor would serve her better than trying to come up with a new weapon. Angus had armor so why shouldn’t she? Lori took her jacket and combined it with a spirit machete to make a spirit jacket. It seemed much tougher than her previous jacket and it glowed. When she put it on, Lori found she could fly with it. Her movements were more precise than what you could get with a jetpack or even rocket boots. She decided it was a worthwhile investment.

Germ was able to make a few Null bombs due to them being cheaper than conventional weapons. Explosives and pyrotechnics were always cheaper due to them being consumables. He would save them foe if there was ever an emergency as he was only able to make two.

Bombshell simply made the Deringer, which used up all her grist and Selmers spent her time duplicating grist for everyone. Once everyone was satisfied with their alchemy for the day, they
went to sleep.

Angus was the only one who couldn’t sleep that night. His thoughts were plagued with images of every possible way things could go wrong. He was the only one who truly understood how low their chances were to succeed. They were in a losing battle against the odds and slowly, Angus felt more and more unable to control the situation. He knew everything yet he could do nothing. There was also the dilemma of whether he should reveal what he knows to the group. Angus knew he should but he didn’t want to burden them with all of this, especially after they were given hope by Dave’s donation of a weapon that could save them. The stress he was under soon dragged him into a deep slumber.

When Angus awoke, he was sleeping next to Gregg. Gregg hadn’t woken up yet so Angus got up and went outside. He saw himself, who waved when he saw him. Angus waved back and walked away from him. He couldn’t bear to look at the version of himself that failed. He walked to the Food Donkey and looked around for anyone else. There was no one so he sat up against the wall of the abandoned grocery store. He needed time to think.

Angus was deep in thought when his other-self came and sat beside him. Angus did his best to act normal but his other-self saw through him.

“I can tell something’s bothering you. I am you, after all.”

Angus sighed, “Is it that obvious?”

“I know what happened today is probably weighing on you. I know you feel like everything’s not in your control. It’s not easy knowing everything while also knowing that you can’t do much about what you know will happen. All I can really say is keep trying. It’s cliché, I know but it’s all you can do and that’s okay. No one expects anything from you. I mean, Gregg felt like you expected more from him. Mae also felt that way. Everyone thinks they have these great expectations to live up to when that’s all in their head. We of all people should know that. We are the mind players. Being a mage means that our knowledge is going to hurt us but in the end, we need that pain to make us stronger. Once you overcome it, that’s when you’ll reach your full potential.”

“I know that but that still won’t help the fact that our failure and our deaths are almost inevitable. I hate having to hide that from everyone but I would also hate risking taking their hope away from them. They trust me to be completely honest with them, so if I say we’re going to fail, they’ll probably believe me.”

“Now, that’s a dilemma. Let them live a hopeful lie or tell them the hard truth. I can’t say what you should do. That’s for you to decide. What do you think is best for the team?”

“I don’t know.” Angus took his glasses off and cleaned them and the other him got a good look at the despair in his eyes.

“Why don’t you just read their minds?”

“I don’t want to invade on their privacy. We all have things we keep locked away in the darkest corners of our minds because we don’t want other people knowing about them.”

“Well, I think they would get past knowing the truth. They’re strong people and I know they wouldn’t hesitate to help you cope with this.”
“You’re probably right. I’ll tell them tomorrow.”

“Tell us what?” It was Gregg.

Both Angus’ were startled by Gregg’s sudden appearance.

“What are you doing here?”, asked Angus.

“I came looking for you when I woke up. What were you two talking about?”, questioned Gregg.

“Can it wait until tomorrow?”

“Nope.”, Gregg sat down, “You are going to tell me what’s wrong and I am going to be here for you because I am your boyfriend.” He nuzzled up against Angus, waiting for Angus to give him what he wanted.

Angus sighed, “I guess I’m fine with you being the first to hear this.”

“Rabies is alive?!”, Mae exclaimed.

“Yeah, come on.” One of the Germs motioned for Mae to follow them.

They reached the bridge where Rabies was found and jumped off, landing in the area below. Upon entering the cave, Rabies and her babies could be seen scurrying around.

“The babies are here, too!” Mae was ecstatic.

“They’re probably just made from our memories but it’s still cool.”, said Germ.

“My rat babies!”, Mae yelled.

Germ looked at her waiting for an explanation.

“Come on, I’ll show you!”, Mae ran out of the small cave and back into town. The Germs followed her into the window of an apartment building. They entered a room which housed the remains of Mallard, Mae’s favorite parade float from when she was a kid.

“So that’s what happened to Mallard.”, said Germ.

“Are the rats inside?”, asked the other Germ.

“Yes, the rats are inside the remains of poor Mallard. At least she got to serve a higher purpose after she died. There’s nothing nobler than providing shelter to those who need it. You will be remembered.”

“It’s just a parade float.”

“How dare you?! Mallard is more than ‘just a parade float’!”

“Whatever you say.”

Mae looked inside of a hole in Mallard and found her precious rat babies. The Germs looked in
There’s a whole family in there.”, stated one of the Germs.

“There weren’t this many when I first came here. I helped them grow by feeding them stolen pretzels.”, Mae explained.

“Cool.”

“It sucks that these aren’t the same rats from back in the real world. They died and it’s so sad. At least their memory will live on in this dream bubble.” Mae made her way out of the building followed by both Germs.

“What should we do, now?”, asked Mae.

“Let’s just fly around and see what we find.”

“Hey, look, it’s Selmers! Hi, Selmers!”, Mae called out. Both Selmers’ were sitting on a roof with their notebooks out.

“Hey, Mae. What are you doing?”

“Just flying around, looking for stuff to do. How about you?”

“I was just about to share my latest poem with my dead-self. Wanna join?”

“Of course! As long as it’s not depressing.”

“It’s not.”

Mae sat down along with the Germs to hear Selmers’ new poem.

“Time is ever-moving,
Like a river of life.
Time is ever-changing,
Filling our lives with strife.
Time is unforgiving,
One day, our lives will end.
Time is very giving,
I got to be your friend.”

“Aaw, that’s so sweet!”, said Mae as she hugged Selmers, “I’m glad we’re friends.”

“Me, too.”, replied Selmers.
Clapping was heard from behind them.

“That was a nice poem.” It was Bombshell.

“Thanks.”

“Where’s the other Bombshell?”, questioned Mae.

“She followed the other Mae and the dead Gregg into the woods for some knife fights.”, answered Bombshell.

“If only I carried knives. We could totally duke it out.”

“I think I’d rather not.”

“Aw, come on! I bet you could beat me.”, Mae pleaded.

“As much as I would like to fight you, we don’t know when Jack is coming back and if he comes back early, we’ll need to be in top condition to fight him. Having knife wounds in our hands would be a detriment to say the least.”

“I guess you’re right. Why does responsibility always have to get in the way of fun?”

“Because that’s how the world works, Mae.”, replied Bea.

“Hi, Bea!”, greeted Mae, “Is the other Bea with you?”

“I’m right here.”

Lori was also there behind the other Bea, “Hi.”

“What are you guys doing here?”, asked Mae.

“We saw a bunch of people gathered up here and we came to see what was going on.”, answered Bea.

“I was just reading a poem to them.”

“You should read it again for Bea and Lori.”, requested Mae.

“Is this going to be another sad one because I’d rather not hear another one of those?”, questioned Bea.

“I told you they weren’t all like that. You just happened to be there for the most depressing one.”, Mae replied.

“It’s not, I promise. I’m sorry I left that impression on you.”

“It’s fine. Okay, let’s hear it.”

Selmers repeated the poem for Bea.
“That was nice.”, said Bea.

“You should tell her the one with the fruit snacks or the one about October or-“, Mae rambled until she was cut off by Bea.

“Calm down. I think that’s enough for now.”

“Awww!”

“How about we go do something?”, suggested Germ.

“What do you have in mind?”, asked Mae.

“We could skateboard. We could go by the abandoned Food Donkey. That’s where Casey and I used to skate.”

“Right, I remember that. Me and Gregg tried to skate once but we failed miserably. Gregg wiped out bad and broke his arm. I was laughing at him because I hadn’t realized he had broken his arm but Casey was there immediately to help him get to a doctor. He always cared like that. I miss him.”

“We all do. I didn’t know him as well as you. He was more your friend than mine but he was definitely a good person.”, replied Bea.

After a moment of silence, Mae said, “Let’s do it. Let’s go skating. Let’s do it for Casey.”

“It’s settled, then.” Germ began the flight to the abandoned Food Donkey and everyone followed him.

Angus explained everything he had talked about with his other self and Gregg listened tentatively.

Gregg gave a small laugh, “Is this just a thing with us, thinking we’re not good enough for each other? First me, then Mae, Lori, and now you? Why you? You said it yourself. You can’t control everything. None of us can. As for not wanting to hurt us, I don’t think you give us enough credit. We’ve all been through some serious stuff. This is just serious stuff on a grander scale. We can’t change the will of the universe. We’re too insignificant by ourselves to make a real difference. Look at me, you’ve got me talking like you, now.”

That got Angus to laugh, “I guess I have, haven’t I?”

“It’s fine, though. That was always one of the things I loved about you.”

“Thanks.”

“What originally made you love me?”

Angus pondered that thought for a moment before responding, “I always liked your carefree attitude. You made me want to be like you.”

“You wanted to be like me? But you’re so smart and kind! I’m just dumb and reckless.”

“You’re not dumb. Sure, you didn’t get the best grades but that didn’t stop you from being happy.
Yes, you were reckless and you often got into trouble but that never held you back. Despite what setbacks you faced, you were always free. I wanted that in my life. I wanted to know why I couldn’t have that. Even this game shows that. I’m the aspect of thought and the class that’s harmed by my aspect. You’re the aspect of freedom and the class that takes it and gives it to others. You gave me the freedom I sorely needed. That’s why I fell in love with you.”

“I may have been free but I wasn’t going anywhere with my life before you came along. You were the anchor that kept me grounded enough to make a future for us. I wouldn’t have a life without you. I’d probably be homeless and jobless. You saw past my crazy personality and accepted me for who I was. I was always an outcast to everyone except Mae because of my impulsive nature and being gay only made me feel worse. Then, you came into my life and changed everything. That’s what made me love you.”

They both sat together for a few moments, letting each other’s stories sink in. This conversation had strengthened their already unbreakable bond.

 Gregg was the first to speak again, “I think you should gather everyone up and tell them about what you’ve been going through. Everyone would be glad to share the burden with you and it’s probably best that we know so we don’t do anything reckless. That’s what you’re here for, to keep the rest of us from making careless mistakes.”

“Yeah, I will. I love you, bug.”

“I love you, too, cap’n.”

They slowly pulled each other into a loving embrace and began to kiss each other passionately. A few seconds later, Mae could be heard yelling.

“Oh my god, they’re kissing! That’s so adorable!”

 Gregg and Angus pulled away from each other in shock and looked up to see everyone looking at them.

“What are you doing here?!”, asked Gregg, embarrassed that all of his friends caught him and Angus making out in front of an abandoned grocery store.

“We came here to go skating. You should join us.”, Mae suggested.

“Are you sure? I broke my arm last time I tried to skate.”

“I know but we all wanted to do this for Casey.”

“Oh… Yeah, I’ll do it. Where’s the other Gregg, Mae, and Bombshell?”

“We’re right here!” Mae came out of the woods followed by Gregg and Bombshell. Mae and Gregg’s hands were cut up pretty badly but Bombshell didn’t have a scratch on her.

“What’s going on?”, asked the dead Mae.

“We’re skating in honor of Casey.”, replied Mae.

“Do we have enough skateboards?”
“Yeah, we went and stole a bunch from some sports store.” Mae took all of the skateboards out of her captchalogue and they fell in a pile on the ground.

Germ walked over and picked up a skateboard, “Alright, I’ll teach you all how to skate.” Everyone sucked at skating except for Germ but they had fun. Many of them fell multiple times but they got back up and kept trying. By the end of the night, all of them could at least get the skateboard to move without falling off.

“Do you guys think that’s enough for tonight?”, asked Mae.

“Hold on. I want to do one last thing before we go. Casey’s favorite trick was always to do a 180 onto this rail and a kickflip at the end. He used that combination to win his first local skating competition and it became his favorite ever since. I want to try it.”, said Gregg.

Germ argued against this idea, “I don’t think you should try that. Casey had been skating for years before he could do that. You’ve only just learned how to move without falling off.”

“I need to try.” Gregg rode to the nearby railing and did a 180. He landed on the rail but failed to keep his balance and he fell, breaking the skateboard in half.

“Damn it!” Gregg wasn’t seriously injured but he was extremely upset with himself for failing Casey’s favorite technique.

“Are you okay?!”, yelled Mae as she ran to Gregg.

“Yeah, I’m fine. I can’t believe I blew it.”

“I told you it was an advanced technique.”, Germ remarked.

“I guess I’m done for today. Can’t really ride with a broken board, can I?”

“Yeah, let’s go to bed.”, Mae agreed.
MB: I am awake!

BS: It’s about time. We’ve been waiting for you.

MB: I’m sorry that I didn’t feel like getting up this morning. Is it even morning? Are mornings and nights even real, anymore?

GT: In the medium, day and night don’t exist because there isn’t a sun. I always thought of it as being awake or asleep. You’ll have day and night in the new universe, though.

MB: That’s good. You guys ready for more gates?

GL: You know it!

MB: I get Germ’s planet this time. What’s it like?

GW: It’s very empty.

Bs: There’s a lot of death. Nothing’s alive except for the occasional small village and the monsters, of course.


GL: I hate to break it to you but my planet isn’t much better. It’s all dark and stuff.

MB: Why?!

AD: Guys, before we go, I wanted to say something.

MB: Go ahead.

AD: After the fight with Eide and Jack yesterday, I realized something. We’re all in more danger than I think any of us realized. Our future depends on random chance at this point and I hate that I can’t change that. That sword is great and all but almost all I can see is failure. I want so desperately to find some way to fix everything but I can’t. I knew that Jack taking both rings was a possibility but I didn’t say anything and now, we’re stuck living with the possibility that he could come back and brutally murder us all in an instant.

BS: If you knew, why didn’t you say anything?

AD: I didn’t want to burden you with my knowledge. I was being selfish. I sat there and didn’t say anything in the hopes that one of the many opportunities for failure wouldn’t happen but it did.

MB: It’s fine. It’s too late to do anything about it so why worry about it? Just tell us this stuff in the future.

AD: That’s the problem. My mind powers can see timelines based on people’s thoughts and
reactions but this is chance we’re dealing with. I’m worthless now and even if we get lucky and he
waits until we’ve almost beaten the game to appear, I doubt I’ll be able to breach his mind now
that he has both rings.

GT: I have an idea! My friend, Rose, is a seer of light. Seers have an innate understanding of their
aspect, kind of like mages except they tend to be more outgoing with the information. Light is the
aspect of good fortune. If anyone can help increase your chances, it’s her. I’ll go message her.

TT: I’m here, John. What do you need?

GT: These people accidentally gave Jack both rings and he almost killed everyone but they used a
fraymotif to trap him in a place where time doesn’t exist. The problem is that when Jack breaks
free, he’ll appear at a random point on the timeline. We wanted to know if there was a way to
increase their chances and I figured you’d be perfect for that.

TT: How bad was the prototyping?

GT: Some weirdo named Eide came and prototyped himself and he had the powers of an eldritch
god inside of him so we’re talking really bad. Also, the eldritch god transferred itself from Eide to
Jack so he has its power times three.

TT: Okay, that’s pretty bad and sadly, despite my ability to see the path to the most fortunate
outcome in any situation, I can’t really tell you what to do. The most I can give you is finish the
game as fast as possible and hope for the best. I see Dave gave you the Royal Deringer so that
should help but I’m afraid this whole timeless realm thing is out of my jurisdiction.

AD: That’s just great.

TT: Sorry I couldn’t help. I wish you the best of luck, though.

MB: I’m sure we’ll be fine. We’ve fought off Eide with black goat powers three times, now. How
hard can Jack be? I know we can win once everyone god tiers.

AD: God tiering is irrelevant in this situation. Sure, it gives us a power boost but that’s not enough.

MB: It also makes us semi-immortal. As long as we don’t do anything heroic or evil, we’ll be fine.

AD: Yes, but wouldn’t the act of putting our lives on the line to fight Jack be considered heroic?
It’s like a catch 22. If we fight, our immortality is worthless but if we don’t fight, what’s the point
of having immortality?

BS: What if fighting Jack was considered defending ourselves? Would that be heroic?

AD: I guess it might depend on your motivations but we all know that a one-on-one fight where
Jack catches us by surprise would be pointless and any group fights we have would be planned,
making them heroic.

GT: That is true but you shouldn’t worry about that. Just complete the gates and hope you can win
against Jack when he returns.

MB: What happened to Eide?
AD: I didn’t get a chance to read his mind before he left so I don’t know.

BS: Can he really do anything? He’s completely powerless now that he doesn’t have the power of the rings or the black goat.

GL: That’s exactly why we need to find him and beat the shit out of him! Now’s our chance to make him pay for everything he’s done!

AD: That can wait until later. We need to focus on preparing ourselves for Jack.

MB: Let’s just go and complete the fifth gates, alright?

GL: Fine.

Angus went to climb his apartment, which had already been built up to the fifth gate and stepped through. He was met with the land of clockwork and tapestries. Compared to every other planet he’d been to, this one appeared to have a much richer culture among the inhabitants. Art clearly played a big part in their lives as well as literature. Books could be found everywhere, many of which described important events in their quest in SBURB.

Angus spent a good amount of time reading but he couldn’t find anything that would help him discover what to do about Jack. He wondered how they knew about their god tier outfits if three of them hadn’t even god tiered yet. It was then he found a book about classpects. There was a detailed description of every class, aspect, and combination of the two as well as pictures of their costumes. He knew that somehow, the lizard people had access to their text conversations with John as well as information about what they all looked like.

Angus flipped to the chapter about the mage of mind. It described everything he already knew about his class from experience. There was no new information to be had. He did like his god tier costume, though.

He finished reading and went off to find what he needed to do to complete his gate. As he traveled, he saw tapestries of the many battles he and his friends had been in. There was their first confrontation with Eide and Angus was reminded of his first death. He saw the battle to steal the rings from Eide and Jack. He wished they hadn’t gone back. They had obtained a ring and then, they lost it again. Now, they’re all depending on random chance to not screw them over if they have any hope of beating this game.

Angus made his way across the land, killing things along the way. Today would be the day he god tiered. This had to give him something. Maybe his new power would be the secret to finding a solution to the mess they were in.

The boss of this world was actually three bosses. They appeared to be imps, only larger but there was more to them than that. They were more powerful than the average enemy. Two of them teleported. Angus anticipated this and ducked under them as they kicked at air. The third one teleported under Angus and swiped its leg at his feet, knocking him over. One of the other two threw a kick down into Angus’ stomach. His armor wasn’t enough to fully protect against the blow and he rolled over in pain, clutching his stomach.

The group of fighters didn’t let up and beat Angus while he was down. A series of punches and kicks sent Angus flying around like a rag doll. Angus was having trouble using his mind powers because there were three of them and they gave him no time to properly read their minds or even activate Cerebral Cadenza. They were too fast. Angus realized he couldn’t rely on his mind powers
and shut off that part of his thought process in order to focus on reacting in the moment.

Angus managed to successfully block enough blows for him to regain some ground. Angus retaliated with magic blasts that were easily dodged. Angus had to dodge many blows himself and was quickly reminded of his asthma. He wasn’t used to having to move so much. He could always map out the best path to victory while putting little strain on his body but he didn’t have that luxury, here.

Angus began wheezing and was then kicked to the ground. The three enemies surrounded him, ready to deal the finishing blow but they made the mistake of celebrating too early. Angus recognized the opportunity and was able to pull off his fraymotif. In his weakened state, he could only muster a second and a half out of it but that was enough for him to stand and fire a beam at two of his combatants. They were knocked back and Angus was able to dodge a blow from the third and fire both of his wands at them. It died and the other two assaulted Angus. They were slow due to Angus weakening them and soon enough, they both fell.

Angus was breathing heavily by the end and his exit gate opened, allowing him to step through. At this point, Angus had reached the top of his echeladder. He messaged Bea to ask to borrow her airship.

AD: Hey, Bea.

BS: Hi, Angus. What’s up?

AD: Can I borrow your airship? I need to get to Prospit to god tier.

BS: Be my guest. Just make sure you bring it back.

AD: I will, thanks.

BS: No problem.

Angus left for Bea’s planet and retrieved the airship. He flew to Prospit and got out of the ship once he felt he was close enough. If he got too close, the prospitans might try to shoot him down. He flew to the surface and pondered the best way to reach the center. He could look for an entrance but he didn’t feel like searching so he simply drilled his way to the center with magic. He saw his sacrificial slab and knew what to do. He laid down on the stone slab and fired a magic beam through his skull. The next thing he knew, he was on Skaia with his new god tier robes and a greater understanding of his aspect. He truly understood everything about everything but he found it impossible to pin down information that he needed.

Everything was laid out before Angus. Every decision, every consequence, cause and effect, all were a part of his mind, his very being. The information was overwhelming. It began to physically hurt him. It felt like his mind would explode.

Please, stop.

It’s too much.

I’m not ready.

I don’t want this.

Why won’t it stop?
There is no hope.

There is no way out.

You could have stopped him.

You failed Everyone.

Everyone is going to die because of you.

STOP!

The thoughts ceased. Angus knew he needed to suppress them. Now, he knew that everything was out of his hands. He had lost his chance to make a difference and now, he had to live with it. All he could do was be there for his friends and hope he hadn’t cost them everything.

Angus flew to where he had parked the ship and began his flight back to Bea’s. On his way back, Mae had sent a message to everyone.

MB: Guys, I need everyone to come to my house NOW! Eide’s holding my parents hostage!

BS: What?!

MB: He wants all of us here. Please, hurry!

GL: You could take him easily.

MB: Yeah, but my parents can’t! He could kill them in an instant! Please, just do what he wants!

AD: Let’s go. Be prepared for anything.

Mae closed her computer and turned to Eide, who was holding her parents in the air with his sprite abilities.

“I did what you wanted, you bastard! Now, let them go!”

“I’ll let them go once everyone’s here."

“What do you even want?”, asked Mae.

“You’ve taken everything from me and now, I’m going to take everything from you.”

“Mae!”, it was Lori, “What’s going on?”

“I don’t know.”

“Two down, six to go.”, stated Eide.

One by one, everyone came. Angus was the last to arrive in the airship.

Once everyone had gathered, Eide spoke, “Good, now, we can begin. As I’m sure many of you have realized, your powers aren’t exactly working on me. I can tell when you’re trying to steal from me and read my mind. It won’t work and here’s why.”

In front of everyone, eight figures appeared. They were very familiar.

“I’m sure our space player is somewhat familiar with ectobiology, correct?”, Eide said as he
looked to Bombshell.

“Yeah, what about it?”, answered Bombshell.

“You’ve done it with frogs but have you ever tried with people?”

“You didn’t…”, Angus started, only for his voice to trail off.

“Say hello to yourselves! The only difference is, they’re better than you in every way. I have manufactured these eight to be perfected versions of you. You will all die at your own hands. You will pay for taking the black goat from me and the black goat will pay for abandoning me!”

The ectobiological copies of everyone began to attack the group. Mae was forced to engage with herself in combat. The sound of metal on wood sounded between them as they clashed. Mae attempted to steal the rage from her other but they began to try and steal it back. An internal battle of tug-of-war ensued as both sides vied for each other’s rage. Mae could fell herself slipping. Her doppelganger was winning and as she lost rage, it became easier for them to steal more.

Bea was having an easier time with her doppelganger. Eide had yet to see her new floating knives so all the other her was armed with was a single knife. Bea sent all five knives into them and pulled them out before causing blood to explode from the wounds with Bloody Crescendo. Bea thought she had won but her doppelganger was somehow able to heal all of the wounds. Their healing was much more advanced than hers.

As Mae felt her will to fight drain from her, her grandpa came and blasted the other Mae in the back with an energy beam, breaking the struggle. Eide saw this and fired his own beam at him, which he blocked by creating a wall between him and Eide with his sprite powers.

While they fought, Mae took the opportunity her granddad gave her and smashed her bat into her copy’s head, sending it face first into the ground. Mae stole back the rage that had been taken and then some. She proceeded to beat her doppelganger with her bat multiple times.

Lori saw Mae’s sprite fighting with Eide and pulled out the medallion her mother gave her. She was about to use it when her other self made a thrust with its machete and caught the medallion on the blade, throwing it to the side. Lori buffed herself with her heart aura and prepared to fight, her doppelganger doing the same.

The medallion landed next to Bea and she picked it up. She activated it and Lori’s sprite appeared.

“Mom?”, Lori called.

“What’s going on, here?”

“Eide’s trying to kill us with doppelgangers. We need your help.”

“Who should I help first?”

Bea got the sprite’s attention, “It would be helpful if we could kill my clone. She’s the healer.”

“Got it.” Lori’s mother flew at the Bea clone and swung at it. It dodged and saw that Mae’s doppelganger was being beaten and healed it. Bea and Lori’s sprite continued to battle the Bea clone and Mae struggled to defend herself against her clone.

Angus’ battle with himself would seem uneventful to an outside viewer because they stood there, unmoving, staring at each other but to them, a war was taking place in their minds. Both fought for
an opening to attack while constantly changing their own thoughts so as to not create an opening for the other.

Angus’ doppelganger spoke, “I can see the cracks in your mind, your insecurities. You’re afraid of failure. You feel the weight of your responsibility grow with every mistake. These things make you weak. You are a failure. Your friends may still love you but you know, deep inside, that you failed them.”

He fired a magic beam at Angus, who had been caught off guard. Angus made an effort to dodge but he felt a searing pain in his side. It wasn’t lethal but the sudden shock sent Angus’ mind into a frenzy. The doppelganger knew this and fired another beam which Angus was able to intercept with his own. They struggled against each other’s magic energy but Angus was weakened. He was slowly losing ground to his other self.

Gregg saw Angus struggling and made an attempt to help but his doppelganger got in his way. Gregg was blasted back by a gust of wind. Gregg used Feathercadence, creating a gust of wind that bore into his clone like a drill. Gregg attacked in unison with the wind and made a large cut in his enemy and burned the wound, as well. He swung his ice dagger and was blocked by the clone but Gregg froze the blade of his counterpart and then cut through it with his fire dagger. He needed to win the fight as quickly as possible so he could help Angus.

Bea saw that Angus was wounded and said to Lori’s mother, “Keep them busy, I need to help Angus.” She ran to Angus and healed him before sending one of her knives flying at his doppelganger. This forced it to dodge and stop the beam struggle.

“Look out!”, yelled Lori’s mother. Bea turned around just in time to block a blow from her clone. She grabbed its arm and sent her knives into it once more. This time, however, her counterpart began to control the knives with her own magic. Her blood covered the blade and allowed her to take control. It healed its wounds and now, Bea was at a disadvantage.

Gregg eventually managed to damage his doppelganger enough to prevent it from moving. It would die soon enough. He saw that Angus was doing okay and that Bea needed help so he joined her and Lori’s mother against the Bea double. They all attacked at once but the clone blocked every blow with the five knives it had control over, not even moving. Gregg blew a large wave of wind across the doppelganger. It didn’t damage it at all but it blew the blood off of the knives, causing them to drop to the ground.

Selmers and Bombshell were working together to take down their doppelgangers. Bombshell’s Deringer was coming in handy due to how powerful it was, even when not used to de-ring people. She was making quick work of her clone but Selmers’ used its time abilities to stop them both in their tracks. Luckily, a time clone came and shot the Selmers doppelganger. It fell, releasing Selmers and Bombshell from their stasis.

“Why didn’t it use time clones?”, asked Bombshell.

“It’s dead, there was no future-self to come back for it.”

Bombshell clashed with her clone and was able to strike it multiple times. When it was extremely weakened, she commanded Selmers to stop her with her time powers. She did this and Bombshell brought up her sword, made it massive in size, and swung it down with all of her might, cutting her doppelganger in half. There was blood everywhere and you could see the insides of the clone.

Germ’s clone was proving to be an extreme nuisance. It didn’t seem to care about the wellbeing of itself or its team as it carelessly tossed high-powered explosives around with no regard for who
they might harm. Germ was forced to banish explosive after explosive into the void to prevent them from wiping his entire group.

Bombshell saw this and rushed up behind Germ’s doppelganger and stabbed him. They were gaining the upper hand. Four of the enemies were dead and Mae’s sprite was keeping Eide occupied. That was what it looked like before Bombshell felt a sudden pain in her shoulder. There was now a hole in it. Selmers’ clone was awake. Eide had healed her and trapped Mae’s granddad in a ball of sprite energy. Bombshell toppled over, dropping the Deringer. Eide picked it up and was about to finish off Bombshell when Selmers fired her Eclipse Canon into him, forcing him to drop the weapon.

Bea’s doppelganger was surrounded by Bea, Gregg, and Lori’s sprite. The clone reached out and somehow healed Gregg’s clone without anyone noticing and it stabbed Gregg from behind. Gregg let out a yelp and stumbled as he turned around. Gregg stole more breath from around him and performed Feathercadence. The other Gregg did the same and drove straight through Gregg’s. Bea tackled Gregg to the ground to avoid it and tried to heal Gregg’s wound to the best of her ability.

While this happened, Angus was beginning to falter against his superior self. It was playing mind games with him and they were getting to him. The thoughts of failure were taking focus away from the fight itself and it showed. Angus was growing tired and his asthma was getting the better of him. He fell to his knees, desperately trying to get air into his lungs. The doppelganger stood over him, ready to finish him off.

Selmers saw Bombshell fall and stopped time for her and Eide. Then, a time clone came and fought with the Selmers clone. They fired shots at each other with their guns and flew around to evade shots from each other. The time clone ultimately won the fight and put a hole in the doppelganger’s head afterward to make sure it stayed dead. Selmers was stuck there stopping Eide from moving and Bombshell from bleeding out. Mae’s grandpa flew over and began healing Bombshell.

Bea and Lori’s mom were busy fighting off Bea and Gregg’s clones while Bea healed Gregg. Bea wasn’t as precise as her clone was with the floating knives but she made them work long enough for Gregg to make a full recovery. Gregg stood and looked to Angus, who was about to be killed by his clone.

“You’ve failed your friends. Don’t you see? There was no point in even trying. You can’t beat us and you can’t beat Jack. You knew that all along, didn’t you?”, said Angus’ clone.

Angus said nothing back but he knew he was right and he had already given up. There was no hope. Why even bother? Angus’ vision went black as his doppelganger shot a magic blast through him.

Gregg was awake just in time to see his lover murdered. Tears clouded his vision, “NO!!!”

The Angus clone looked into Gregg’s tragedy-stricken eyes, “It looks like he wasn’t good enough, after all. It’s a shame he was so weak. At least he probably wasn’t worth much to you, right?”

Gregg’s sadness turned to rage and his body shook, “You piece of shit! He was EVERYTHING to me!”

Everyone heard Gregg’s cries of anguish and turned to see him sprint at Angus’ other. As he ran, everyone felt their breath being ripped out of them. The clone felt a surge of power coming from Gregg and became scared for an instant. In that instant, Gregg let out a blood-curdling scream
and released all of the breath he had stolen in a single blow. Angus’ doppelganger exploded and everyone not in the blast was almost knocked over by the sheer force of the wind. Afterwards, Gregg simply knelt by Angus’ side and held him, weeping.

Everyone wanted to be there for Gregg but they still had fights to win. Bombshell was fully healed and stood up.

“Go help Mae, it looks like she might need it.”, requested Selmers.

Bombshell nodded and ran to Mae’s side. With them working together, Mae’s clone was down in a few moments.

Mae called to Lori, “Do you need help?”

“No, I’ll be fine.”

Mae and Bombshell ran to help Bea and Lori’s mother. Mae helped fight Gregg with Lori’s sprite and Bombshell helped Bea fight herself. The fight was de-escalating very quickly. It didn’t take long for Gregg’s clone to die and for Bea’s clone to die with no hope of healing either of them. Lori, too, was able to best herself in combat. The battle was over, but the war was seemingly lost. Angus had died and without him, the game was unwinnable.

Gregg was sobbing and Mae and Bea had tears in their eyes. Everyone else stood in silence, still sad but not as attached to Angus as the others were. Everyone was mourning when Angus’ body began to glow. He floated into the air and the wounds were all healed. He returned to the ground and opened his eyes.

The first thing Angus felt was Gregg hugging him and burrowing his face in his chest. Everyone’s faces lit up at the return of Angus.

Gregg’s muffled voice could be heard, “Please don’t leave me like that again! I need you!”

Bea was the first to raise concern about Angus’ sudden revival, “How are you alive? I saw you fighting with your clone thing and it killed you. We were fighting to stop Eide and save Mae’s parents. What happened that made your death not heroic?”

“Does it really matter?”, asked Gregg.

“Yes, it does. If he knows how we can cheat the system, that would be a huge help to us.”

Angus was visibly anxious at the question but he knew he had to answer.

“I… gave up.”

“What?” Gregg was taken aback by this response.

“It made me feel worthless to the point where I didn’t see the point in fighting anymore. I died a failure, not a hero.”

Gregg pushed Angus back, “What the hell is wrong with you?!! That’s bullshit! You just gave up?! Did you stop to think how that would make me feel?!!”

Angus was shocked, “I-“ he was cut off.

“No, you didn’t or you wouldn’t have sat there and let yourself die like some worthless piece of garbage! I’m the worthless piece of garbage!”
“Gregg—” Angus attempted to speak again but was cut off once more.

“No, you don’t get to say anything! Weren’t you the one who told me not to die for you?! If so, what makes you think you have the right to die because you gave up?! Was what you said a lie? What else have you lied to me about? Obviously, if I’m not worth living for, everything you said about me being a good person was bullshit!”

Everyone stood there in silence for a few moments. Angus took that as an opportunity to speak, “Bug, I’m sorry for being a hypocrite. I shouldn’t have let myself die but I was just so scared. I was so terrified of failure that I forgot why I was scared in the first place. I was scared of failing you but I failed anyway. I didn’t just fail at winning this game. I failed at being your boyfriend. I wouldn’t hold it against you if you wanted to find someone who would be better to you. I just hope you know that I really meant it when I said you were a good person.”

Gregg let out a weak laugh, “You idiot. All I want is to be with you. I don’t want to be with someone else. I want you to see me as someone good. I’m not breaking up with you, it just really hurts me to think that I wasn’t enough to give you the motivation to keep going. I want to mean as much to you as you do to me.”

“You mean the world to me, bug and I hate myself for forgetting that.”

“Show me you mean that by being there when we win this game and go to the new universe.”

“I promise, I’ll be there.”

It was then that Jack appeared in a flash. He went straight for Selmers, who dodged but lost her hold on Eide. Bombshell took out the Deringer and flew at Jack. Eide came between them and held Bombshell with his sprite magic. He took the sword and attacked Jack himself, throwing Bombshell to the side. Jack clashed with Eide.

“Eide’s trying to get the rings!”, stated Angus.

Mae and Gregg decided it would be a good time to pull out their fraymotif, Espressivo Theft. The breath and rage of Jack and Eide exploded out and were absorbed by Gregg and Mae, respectively. Gregg and Bombshell then used Accented Gale, wherein Gregg sends out a small, concentrated ball of breath and Bombshell uses her space powers to cause it to instantly grow massive and explode. Mae and Angus activated Legato Lunacy and slowly filled Eide and Jack’s minds with manic thoughts. They were both sent into a frenzy and began attacking wildly.

Mae got busy stealing the rage back. Selmers and Lori saw Mae attempting to power herself up and used Soaring Stretto, using Selmers’ time powers to create a loop of heart, infinitely supplying Mae with the aspect. Bea and Germ’s fraymotif was Siphon Slur. They focused it on Jack and began draining his blood from him, turning it into nothing.

With everyone taking part in a fraymotif, Jack was almost being overwhelmed and Eide saw this as an opportunity to strike. He rushed Jack and managed to cut through both of the fingers with the rings on them. Selmers held Eide with her time stop and Mae, with all of her rage and heart, smashed her bat into Jack’s skull. A satisfying crack followed by a snap was heard as she both broke his skull and snapped his neck. The black goat erupted from his body and took refuge in Eide. It wasn’t pleased to work with the man who had just previously attempted to ruin its plans by killing everyone but they would have to endure it for now. The first order of business was breaking Eide out of Selmers’ grip.

The black goat broke through the time stop and told Eide to retrieve the ring at all costs. Eide
really was pathetic. He swapped sides as soon as he got what he wanted and he went down to retrieve the rings, which had fallen to the ground. Mae intercepted him and clashed with him. Mae was a force to be reckoned with and Eide felt it.

Bombshell grabbed the rings, “There’s a volcano on my planet. I’ll throw these in there. It’ll be like Lord of the Rings.” She flew up to the second gate and went through. Eide’s expression, instead of becoming one of anger like everyone had expected, turned to a wide grin. Everyone had forgotten that he could teleport. He disappeared and everyone panicked, flying after Bombshell.

Bombshell had spawned next to the volcano and flew to it. Eide appeared at the top of the volcano.

“Give me the rings.”, demanded Eide.

“Why would I do that?”

“If you give them to me, I’ll let you live. I’ll even leave you alone for the rest of the session until after the final boss.”, Eide offered.

“Forget it. I’m not giving them to you.”

“You know you can’t take me in a one-on-one in a fight. You haven’t even god tiered yet.”

“When everyone else gets here, we’re gonna kick your ass!”

“If I see anyone else get here, I’ll kill you. Your session will be dead.”

Bombshell hesitated for a moment and then, Mae appeared.

“Time’s up.” Eide charged a beam to fire at Bombshell when she threw the rings at the volcano and increased the speed of their flight to just below light speed in an attempt to destroy them. To her dismay, Eide teleported and caught the rings just as they were about to hit the lava.

Mae appeared at Bombshell’s side just in time to see him catch the rings and everyone else followed one-by-one.

“You’ve all arrived just in time to see me grasp the true meaning of godhood. Behold!” Eide donned both rings and the same shockwave that exploded from Jack came again.

“Fine! You got your rings! Now, leave!”, demanded Bombshell.

“I’m afraid that deal is off of the table. You betrayed the rules of that agreement.”

“Don’t you need us for something?”, asked Mae.

“Yeah, you’re right but I need to punish you somehow. Hmm… I’ve got it.” Eide snapped his fingers and disappeared in a flash.

“What’s he doing?”, wondered Gregg.

“We need to get back to Mae’s house, ASAP.”, replied Angus.

“What... Oh no.”, Mae’s voice turned from confusion to realization and her expression became one of pure horror. She rushed back to her house. Everyone else followed. When Mae reached her house, she kicked the door down, but at the ready but she was too late. On the floor of the living room laid the bloodied corpses of her mother and father. Her grandfather was trapped in sprite energy and he was crying.
Mae’s mind shattered and all of the self-control she had gained over the course of the adventure was thrown out the window. Mae’s rage swelled to a point where she could infinitely steal it from herself and still fight with a burning anger. She ran at Eide, forgetting she could fly for a moment through her anger.

“MAE!”, yelled Bea.

“Dude, stop!”, Gregg called.

Mae swung at Eide and Eide blocked effortlessly, even though the force of the clash shook the house to its foundation, threatening to reset all of the progress Lori had made on her house.

“What are you doing? Do you actually think you can win?”, questioned Eide mockingly.

“I almost beat Jack when he had both rings and I was less than half as fucking angry as I am right now!”

“I do have to admit, this level of anger was unexpected.”

“What the hell is wrong with you!? YOU KILLED MY PARENTS!!!”

“I had to punish you somehow and I couldn’t kill any of you so I settled for the next best thing.”

“You make killing the people I love sound like some kind of sick, twisted game!”

“SBURB is a game, isn’t it?”

“Shut the fuck up!”

“Weren’t you the one telling me to stop using such foul language? What happened to that?”

Mae growled and continued her assault. Every blow was felt by the rest of the party and they tried to figure out what to do.

“This is the fight with Jack all over again!”, Gregg pointed out.

“Why is Eide still here if he doesn’t want to kill any of us?”, asked Bea.

Angus replied, “The answer is simple. He enjoys our suffering. He would never pass up the chance to toy with Mae in the state she’s in.”

“I’m going to help her.”, stated Lori.

“Are you crazy!? You don’t stand a chance against him!”, argued Gregg.

“I have to try.” Lori attempted to ambush Eide from behind but he saw it coming. He grabbed her and held her by the neck.

Eide sighed, “It’s cute that you tried to help your friend because you have a dream-self but I have to warn you, the dream-self can only be brought back if there’s a body to kiss and if I weren’t required not to kill you, you would be a pile of ashes on the floor. I can, however, at least partially fulfill your death wish.” Eide summoned a sword and thrust it through Lori’s chest. He dropped her to the ground and stabbed Bea, as well.

“Oh my god!”, Mae screamed as she ran to Lori’s side.
“I guess that’s enough for now. See you when you beat the game.” Eide disappeared, leaving Mae kneeling over Lori, holding her and endlessly apologizing, and everyone else running to her side. Unfortunately, Lori hadn’t died immediately. She struggled to breathe between grunts and whimpers. Bea was dead so she couldn’t heal Lori at all and everyone else could only sit there and helplessly watch as Lori died slowly. It felt like an eternity before Lori’s breathing ceased and her body went cold in Mae’s arms. Mae kissed Lori and her dream-self woke up.
Chapter 13

Lori woke up in her room on Prospit, still traumatized by her recent death. She slowly got up and looked outside. The skies were almost empty. The last of the Prospitan warriors were leaving. The war would be over soon and they were running out of time.

Lori began the flight back to her friends when an arm grabbed her ankle and she was suddenly teleported somewhere unfamiliar to her. Four stone slabs floated in the center of this large room. She recognized them as the sacrificial slabs at the center of Prospit from the aspect symbols on them. Hers was among them, a pink heart split in half, one half solid and the other hollow.

Suddenly, Lori was held down to her slab and she saw that Eide was the one doing it.

“N-no, please! I d-don’t want to die a-again!” Lori was horrified and she struggled against Eide’s grip to no avail. Eide made a sword and Lori began to squirm harder. She was screaming.

“Shut up! I won’t kill you right now as long as you follow my instructions exactly.”

Lori calmed down a bit but she was still hyperventilating.

“Good. Now, take this sword and stab me with it.” Eide extended the handle out to Lori, who hesitantly took it. She suddenly felt empowered. This would be her chance to redeem herself and save the session. She thrust the sword into Eide with all of her might. Eide simply smiled.

“Alright, for being a good little girl, I’ll make your death painless this time.” Eide took the sword and cut Lori’s head off, leaving her on the slab. Lori managing to do that much damage to a god times three boosted her to the top of her echeladder and now, she would god tier. This would make the rest of the game go faster. Eide knew that Bombshell would probably god tier on her own today so he didn’t worry about her. Soon, everything would belong to him and the black goat.

When everyone saw the bright light shining from Skaia, they were confused. How had Lori god tiered? She still had a decent chunk left to go on her echeladder. Mae was the only one who didn’t seem to notice. She simply sat on the floor, knees clutched to her chest and a hopeless look on her face.

Bea came back to life. She would never get used to dying like that. Looking around, everyone except for Mae was looking at the light on Skaia. Bea decided to try to comfort Mae. If anyone knew what it felt like to lose their parents, it was her.

“Hey, Maeday.” Bea sat down next to Mae and hoped that using their nicknames would lighten the mood at least a little bit. Mae didn’t respond. She was too lost in her own thoughts to even notice Bea. She wasn’t even crying anymore. Bea placed a hand on her shoulder, causing her to flinch.

“Oh… Hey, Bea…” Mae’s voice was less than a whisper. Tears rolled down her face again as her personal bubble had been popped, leaving her with nothing to shield her from the pain.

“I wanted to talk to you about your parents.”

“What is there to talk about? They’re dead and they can’t be brought back. There’s nothing we can
“I know what it’s like to lose your parents. You saw what it did to me.”

“You have your parents back.” There was almost a tinge of resentment or jealousy in Mae’s voice.

“But I didn’t know I would have them back and that they would be okay for years. I could never have known that all of this would happen.”

“I think this might be the world’s way of forcing me to grow up. I always knew that everything would change one day but I tried so hard to keep things the same. Now, I’m losing everything.”

“You still have us… You still have me.”

Mae began to cry harder, “I don’t know what to do.”

“Win SBURB and live the life your parents wanted for you.”

“Do I really deserve it? Is it even possible?”

“Of course, you do and yes, it’s possible. You can’t let their deaths go to waste like I did.”

“I should have been there. I never even got to say goodbye. I never got to tell them I loved them one last time. There’s so much I never got to say, so much I never got to do.”

Bea went and hugged Mae like she wished someone had hugged her when her mom died.

“Bea?”, asked Mae.

“What?”

“You know back in the mines when I started walking absent-mindedly across that water?”

“Yeah, what about it?”

“The reason I didn’t seem like I was really there was because, in my mind, I fell into a hole in the ground. When I was falling, I told myself that I wanted to hope again. I wanted to lose. I wanted it to hurt. I wanted it to hurt because that would mean that it meant something. Everything was changing and I wanted it to hurt me so that I would know that what I was losing mattered to begin with but now that it actually hurts, I want it to stop. It’s hurting the people I care about. I didn’t want that. It was supposed to be me that was hurting, not all of you, not the billions of people that died on Earth, it was me who was supposed to be hurt.”

“Mae…”

“But I guess what hurt me inside was the thought of losing everyone. When I was away at college, everything changed and I wasn’t here for it. Then, I got back and when I needed it most, nothing was there for me to hold onto. I was grasping at straws, hoping that I could salvage something and luckily for me, I did find something. I found you. Gregg and Angus were leaving, my parents were losing their house, the town was dying, but through all of that, you were the one person I could depend on to be there for me, even if it was just due to proximity.”
“… I think it was more than proximity that kept us together.”

“Really? What else was there? You’re so smart and you were always meant to be successful but instead, I got the opportunity you deserved and I wasted it. How could you forgive me for that?”

“It wasn’t your fault I didn’t get to go to college. I was a victim of circumstance. Me being jealous of you was just a phase. I only felt that way in an attempt to make myself feel justified in being upset towards something out of my control.”

“It’s amazing to me that you can sit there and say that after everything that’s happened. I don’t know what I’d do if I was in your shoes.”

“Maybe you already are. You lost your parents and I have mine. You’re feeling hopeless and I’m fighting for something.”

“Is this really how you felt?”

“I can’t be sure. We’re different people who experience different emotions. I don’t know what you’re feeling right now.”

“I guess you’re right. Are you really sure we can win?”

“We are going to win, and when we get to the new world, we are going to live happy lives together and even though the tragedy will still be there, at least we’ll have each other. Damn, that sounded cliché.”

That managed to get Mae to let out a slight chuckle, “Yeah, let’s do it.” Up until this point, everyone else had let Bea handle Mae as they eavesdropped on the conversation. Angus felt bad that he had planted doubts in Mae’s mind about their victory.

“All right, that’s enough sad talk! Now it’s time for hugs!” Gregg ran and nearly tackled Mae to the ground. Mae was caught by surprise but she soon started laughing, tears still flowing from her eyes as Bea looked at them with a smile on her face. Angus walked up to her.

“You did well. I think we’ll be able to move past this thanks to you.”, Angus complimented.

“Thanks. I wish I could fix all of her problems, though.”, Bea lamented.

“I wish that, too but these are things that are rooted deep within her psyche. We all have problems like this. We’ve been able to patch some things here and there but it’ll take years of treatment before our trauma is fixed. I still have bad thoughts about my parents even though it seems like I’m past them. I know Gregg still harbors some self-doubt. The sheep incident really did a number on him. I know you still look at your parents with a hint of sadness because they still remind you of everything you’ve been through. Mae’s been through more than any of us and this scenario was always going to be the one to push her over the edge. She can handle a lot with the support of us and her parents and once those are stripped away, the tower topples. You did a great job building it back up again.”

“I’m sure you or Gregg could’ve done the same.”

“What makes you say that?”, Angus wondered.
“Well, you’re so smart and you could probably just read her mind and help her in the best possible way and Gregg has just been with Mae longer than I have.”

“What Mae’s going through isn’t something so shallow. The mind is only the surface of everything that goes on deep within. Yes, the mind is definitely part of it but there are so many layers behind it that people spend years studying therapy and the mind and are still only able to partially fix people’s problems through years of hard work. We can’t fix our pasts, we can only move forward with them. Outside of my mind powers, I’m not exactly the best at making people feel better.”

“What about Gregg?”

“Gregg and Mae have been best friends since childhood but I don’t think he would have done much good. You’re best friends with Mae in a different sense than Gregg is. Gregg is the person Mae can go to and always have a fun time but you’re her corner. She even said it herself that you were what she held onto for the longest time. When she needs you, you’ll be there for her. What you two have is special. Don’t ever let it go.”

“What are you saying?” Bea began to blush.

“Heh, I was right. You’re blushing.”

“Right about what?”, replied Bea nervously.

“Don’t worry, I’m sure she feels the same way.” Angus lifted his glasses and winked, walking away soon after.

Bea couldn’t believe what just happened. Angus thought she was in love with Mae. There was no way. Why did she blush, then? She wasn’t gay! She slept with a guy at math camp. It didn’t amount to anything though and she did have to admit, it wasn’t as satisfying as she thought sex was supposed to be. Did she have feelings for Mae? Bea shook her head and decided to stop thinking about it for now.

Gregg eventually loosened his grip on Mae and held her out in front of him. Mae saw that Gregg was crying with her.

“Was that really necessary?”, asked Mae.

“Of course, it was! Hugs are the best medicine for sadness!”, Gregg replied excitedly. The smile he had on his face soon turned to a frown and a mix of pity and anger accompanied it.

“That bastard is gonna pay. It won’t be long, now. Only two more gates to go and then we either win and go free or fail and live out the rest of our meaningless existence here.” Gregg’s expression continued to shift from angry, to sad, to comforting, until it settled into a smile, this one more serious, “You and I, we’ll make sure we win, right? Just remember, nothing can hold us back except for ourselves, not even the will of the universe.”

“Yeah. Yeah, you’re right. We’re so close. We can’t stop now. We won’t let anything stop us.”

“That’s right! Nothing can stop us!” Gregg had secretly been giving Mae breath as he talked to her. Mae failed to notice and only felt freer as Gregg motivated her to keep going.

“Yeah, I think I can function, at least.”, Mae replied.

“That’s good to hear. Listen, I know this probably isn’t the best time to ask, but what are we doing with the bodies?”, Angus reluctantly asked.

“…Let’s bury them for now. We can give them a proper funeral when we win SBURB.”

“I’m on it.”, said Gregg sullenly. He went outside and used the windy thing to create two person-sized holes in the yard. Mae placed them in with the help of Angus, Bea and Gregg covered the holes back up. Everyone was silent as Mae’s parents were laid to rest.

“I’ll be back for you, I promise.” Mae looked up to see Lori coming in at full speed. She was only a spec in the sky at the moment, but she would be there soon. A few minutes later, Lori arrived.

Mae smiled and hugged Lori, “Welcome back, kid.”

“I’m s-sorry I worried you.”, replied Lori.

“It’s fine. It worked out in the end. You’re a god tier, now! If anything, I should be sorry you had to go through that. Also, how did you god tier?”

“Eide told me to stab him and that put me at the top of my echeladder. Then, he killed me again. It was quick this time.”

“Why would he expedite the process of god tiering, especially with a page? What does he want from us?”, Angus wondered.

“Who cares? What we should be excited about is what new powers Lori has!”, Gregg exclaimed.

“I don’t feel much different.”, replied Lori.

“Just try the hearty thing. Wow, that sounded dumb.”

“I’m pretty sure that only works for the windy thing, bug.”, agreed Angus.

“What about the bloody thing?”, asked Bea.

Angus shrugged, “Windy thing just has a nice sound to it. I don’t know what it is.”

Lori took a deep breath and attempted to use her heart aura. It swelled larger than before and seemed to drain less stamina but it certainly wasn’t what you’d expect to see from the class with the most potential in the game. Lori continued to push it and some people had to step back a bit but soon, the field dissipated, leaving Lori gasping for air.

“Damn it! It was supposed to be larger! I was supposed to be the best! Why isn’t it working?!”. Lori had had such high expectations for herself that seeing only a superficial increase in her power devastated her.

“Lori, calm down. It’s okay.”, assured Mae.

“I thought I would finally be as strong as all of you but I’m still the same.”
“Don’t be so hard on yourself. Just keep working at it and I’m sure you’ll get it eventually.”, said Gregg.

“We don’t have time for that!”

“You have to try.”

“Maybe, she’ll discover more about her aspect in her sixth gate.”, Angus proposed.

“Do we have time for that today?”, asked Mae.

“Is anyone tired, yet?”

No one said no so Angus continued, “Then, I guess we can do them now. That would mean that tomorrow is the final push. Is everyone prepared for that?”

Again, no one answered. “I’ll take that as a yes. Let’s all go do the sixth gate.” Everyone said their goodbyes and flew off.

Lori returned to her house and her mother was waiting there for her.

“I take it the new page powers were underwhelming?”, asked her mother.

“How did you know?”, replied Lori.

“I can tell because you haven’t fully opened up your heart yet.”

“What does that mean?”

“All that means is you need to understand yourself more and you need to open up more in order to make the most out of your powers.”

“How do I do that?”

“Only you have the answer to that.”

“Geez, I thought you didn’t like clichés?”

“This one is true, though.”

“Whatever, I’m just going to go complete the sixth gate.”

“Bye.”

Lori flew to the top of her house and threw the sixth gate. It amazed her that this would be the final gate she’d face before her denizen and then, the end of the game. It seemed to go by so fast. Germ’s world, however, quickly dispelled the novelty of this fact. The landscape was incredibly drab. Lori sighed and ventured forth.

Lori effortlessly fought through waves of enemies as she explored. When she occasionally found lizard people, they always seemed to be in terrible condition. She gave them what heart she could
and hoped they could make it from there.

After a few hours of flying around, Lori saw a hideous beast. It was an amalgamation of parts that was almost offensive to look at. It appeared to be laying down until Lori came into its line of sight, causing it to let out a gurgling, growl-like sound. Lori saw that it had tentacles, which tried to swing at and grab her.

Lori dodged a few blows and cut through a tentacle with her spirit chain. Screeching was heard but the monster continued its assault, adding in acid spits from its mouth. When Lori got close enough, it struck with crude claws. Lori’s left arm was grazed. It annoyed her that her costume left her arms and legs exposed. The creature swung again but Lori stabbed its hand and flew around to the back of it while it was distracted with its bleeding hand.

Lori looked behind the monster and saw a cave. This was probably something it was trying to defend. She went to see what was inside when she was pinned to the wall by the behemoth. When Lori tried to stab its claw again, she found her arm to be immovable. Lori tried buffing her heart and pushing her way out but it was no use.

Looking down, Lori was actually able to see what was so important in the cave. There were three smaller variations of the giant she had been fighting. She couldn’t tell by any facial cues but they were afraid, and she could feel it in their souls. That was when it clicked. Lori hadn’t been able to make full use of her powers because she had forgotten the reason she fought in the first place. Over time, gaining power and skill became the motivating force behind her will to fight. What Lori forgot was that when she first agreed to join this death game, she did it so she could protect and fight for her friends.

With this realization, Lori was able to craft an aura out of her heart that was able to repel the monster’s grip on her. She flew up and away from the cave, but not before giving it all of the heart she could muster. She appreciated that the creature had a family to protect like she had friends. This act of kindness turned out to be just what Lori needed to complete her gate. Taking one last look back at the cave, she flew through.

Bombshell had just finished killing the boss of her sixth gate. It was a good half an hour of slowly beating down a giant dragon-like monster due to her being underleveled. She suspected it would have taken much longer if she hadn’t had the Deringer.

It was extremely late by the time Bombshell got out. She read her messages and saw that people were already sleeping.

Bs: Bea, are you awake?

BS: I am. What do you want?

Bs: Can I take the airship so I can god tier?

BS: Do you really want to do that tonight?

Bs: Yes. By the time I get there and back home, I should be good to stay awake for the rest of the game.

BS: Be my guest.
Bs: Thanks.

BS: No problem.

Bombshell flew to her third gate and found Bea’s house. As she flew, she noticed the people of the planet tearing down the factories that had imprisoned them for so long. Bombshell liked to see that this planet’s problems were being fixed.

The flight was lonely and boring. Bombshell felt the urge to fall asleep multiple times but she resisted. When she got to Derse, it was empty. The war was ending. Tomorrow really was the final day.

After opening her way to the center of Derse for what would hopefully be the last time, Bombshell was met with Eide.

“Hello”, greeted Eide.

“What are you doing here?”, asked Bombshell menacingly.

“I’m just here to make sure you don’t screw this up.”

“Why shouldn’t I just kill you right now?”

Eide snickered, “If you could kill me, I wouldn’t be here.”

“Let’s see where that arrogance gets you when I take those rings for myself!” Bombshell flew at Eide, who promptly dodged.

“Please, you’re still using a jetpack. You’re not nearly fast enough to catch me.”

That’s when Bombshell pulled out a new trick she’d learned. Her space powers could manipulate more than volume. She could control speed, as well. She appeared next to Eide in what seemed like an instant but Eide saw it coming. He held his sword where he knew Bombshell would go, allowing her to impale herself on the blade. He took it out and kicked her to her slab. Her body began to glow and she woke up on Skaia. She decided to pay a visit to the dream bubble so she could say goodbye to their friends in the afterlife.

While Bombshell made her journey to the furthest ring, everyone else was sleeping. The sixth gate had simply been a normal endeavor for them and they were able to finish them relatively quickly.

Mae woke up and went to greet her other self for what may be the last time.

“Hi, me!”, Mae greeted.

“Why, hello there, me. How are you?”, replied the other Mae in a fake snobbish accent.

Mae copied the voice herself, “I am fine. How about you? How have you been on this lovely day?”

“Simply, divine. Haha.”

“Haha, okay, I think we can stop.”
“Yeah, that voice is really hard to do.”

“So, I guess I should get this out of the way now. Our game is almost complete.”

“Really? That’s great!”

“Yeah, but it also means that this may be the last time we see each other.”

“Oh.”, the dead Mae’s expression saddened.

“I’m going to miss you a lot.”

“Me, too. I’m glad you’re making it.”

“Yeah. Let’s make sure we get all that we can from our final moments together!”", Mae declared as she dragged her other-self outside.

“Where are we going?”, asked the other Mae.

“We are going to relive one of our favorite childhood memories.”

“You don’t mean…”

“Yep, it’s time for Mallard to make her grand return!”

Gregg and Angus woke up on their bed, which their other-selves graciously allowed them to use. They went out to the living room and saw themselves snuggled up on the couch, cuddling and laughing as they talked about something.

Angus’ dead-self was the first to notice the other couple’s awakening. “Hey, guys. How are you?”

“Good. Today was another crazy day. I’m almost jealous you get to stay here and not worry about SBURB, anymore.”, answered Angus.

“Yeah! You’re here, cuddling, while we’re out there fighting clones of ourselves!”", Gregg added.

“Clones?”, wondered the other Gregg.

“Right, that probably sounds weird out of context. I’ll just explain it to you.” Gregg went on to ramble about all of the crazy things that happened that day.

“Oh, wow. Is Mae okay?”, asked the dead Gregg.

“Bea helped her a lot but this won’t be going away anytime soon.”, replied Gregg.

“How about you two? Is everything alright?”, continued the dead Angus.

“We had a pretty heated argument but I think we’re okay.”, answered Angus.

“That’s good to hear.”

“What were you two talking about when we woke up?”, questioned Gregg.
“We were actually talking about what it would have been like to have children like we were talking about at Mae’s that one time.”

That got Gregg excited, “Oh, yeah! I forgot about that! How would that work? Would we adopt someone else’s kids or would we do it with one of our friends or, or, or…”

“Gregg calm down.”, Angus started, “I actually have an idea that might be able to create a true mix of both of us, without any outside genes. It’s a longshot and I’d have to ask John about it, but It’s worth a shot.”

“What is it?!”, Gregg yelled ecstatically. The idea of kids seemed to really get Gregg happy for some reason.

“You know how Eide made those clones of us? If it’s connected to the frog ectobiology, like he said, then we may be able to combine samples of the two of us and create a new being out of it.”

Gregg was beaming with joy, “That would mean it would truly be ours! What do you think would happen? Whose traits would be inherited? Would they be a fox or a bear? Would they have red fur or yellow fur? Ahhhhhh, we have to win so we can see!”

“It doesn’t matter what features they have, as long as they’re ours. We’ll give them a good childhood. That’s all I need to be happy. Also, it’s not a definite, yet. For all we know, it might not work that way.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know but it just sounds so exciting and it gives us another reason to fight. We can’t give that child a life unless we win, so we’re going to win.”

“I guess that is another reason to keep going.”

“So, what are your plans for tonight?”, questioned the other Angus.

“Well, tonight is most likely our last night here. I want to go out with a bang.”, stated Gregg.

“What? It’s your last night? Aw, man!”, whined the dead Gregg.

“Yeah, the game is almost over. Tomorrow is the final push.”, Angus explained.

“I know it sucks but just think of how happy they’ll be.”, argued the other Angus.

“Yeah, you’re right. What did you have in mind for your ‘bang’?”, asked the dead Gregg.

“We’re going skating again.”, said Gregg.

Both Maes flew towards the apartment with Mallard in it and they met the deceased Bombshell on their way.

“Hey, Bombshell!”, greeted the Maes in unison.

“Hello. What’cha up to?”

“We’re bringing Mallard back! Actually, you could probably help us with that. If you could shrink
Mallard down for us, that’d be great.”

“Who’s Mallard?”

“Other me, go get the Beas. We’ll need her to help us repair Mallard with all of her knowledge on hammers. I’ll show Mallard to Bombshell. Also, tell one of the Beas to go get Germ. We’ll need him for this, too. You’ll see why later.”, commanded the dead Mae.

“You got it!” Mae flew off to find Bea and the other Mae led Bombshell inside the abandoned apartment.

“Woah, this thing is huge!”, exclaimed Bombshell.

“Isn’t it awesome?”

“It’s kinda creepy if you ask me.”

“Don’t you dare insult Mallard like that!”

Bombshell was a bit taken aback by Mae’s outburst, “Okay, geez, no need to get so worked up about it.”

“I will get worked up about it if I want to get worked up about it. Now, help me move this thing outside.”

Meanwhile, our Mae was flying around until she saw Bea talking to herself on the bridge.

“BEA, HEY!”, Mae screamed as she closed in on them.

“HI, MAE!”, Bea yelled back. Soon enough, they were in close enough proximity to hear each other without screaming.

“So, what’s up?”, asked Bea.

“Both of me and a Bombshell are bringing Mallard back to life! We could use your help patching her up, though. Your immense knowledge of hammers should come in handy.”

“We know about more than just hammers, you know.”

“Oh, right, I forgot nails. There are so many different types of nails.”

Both Beas sighed and said, “Whatever, let’s just go.”, in unison.

“Wow, you two really are the same person, aren’t you?”, replied Mae as she flew off.

“Oh, wait, I almost forgot. Could one of you go grab both Germs?”

“Why?”, asked the other Bea.

“My other-self has a plan. I’m not sure what it is, yet.”

“I’ll go.”, offered the dead Bea before flying away.
The other Mae was watching as Bombshell shrunk Mallard before screaming, "WAIT, MY RAT BABIES!!!" Bombshell ceased shrinking the parade float as Mae rushed up to a hole in Mallard and ushered a bunch of rats out. Bombshell watched in awe as Mae apologized to them for taking their home and telling them she would bring it back soon.

"Alright, we’re good, now. You can keep shrinking her."

"Okay.", was the only response Bombshell could give to what had just happened. Soon, Mallard was outside and back to full size, and it was just in time for Mae to come back with her Bea.

"Alright, perfect timing. Wait, are the rat babies okay?!", Mae pleaded.

"They’re fine.", assured the other Mae. Bea and Bombshell stared at each other in confusion.

"We should get started if you want this done before we wake up again.", urged Bea, "I’ll go get some supplies from the pickaxe. Can you start figuring out what needs fixing?"

"On it!", answered Mae. It was then that the dead Bea arrived with both Germs in tow.

"While you do that, I need to talk to Germ about some stuff. I’ll be right back.", said the other Mae. She flew and took the Germs aside and conversed with them for a bit before sending them off. She then returned with the other Bea and they all began scouting out problems with Mallard.

"These wheels need some oil and there are quite a few holes to patch but overall, I’d say we can get this thing functional before the end of the night.", determined Bea before pointing at Mae, "I’ll go tell your Bea to grab some oil and sheet metal."

Mae smiled wide as the memories of her childhood came rushing back. It was something to remind her of better times, times when she could be a rebel and not be punished for it, times where she didn’t have to take responsibility for so much in her life. They were times where she wasn’t slowly losing everything good in her life with the promise of new, adult opportunities that never came.

"I could make it go faster."

Mae waved a hand in the air, "Hey, Selmers! Hey, other Selmers!"

"Hey. I heard you talking about rebuilding this thing and I was thinking I could use my time clones to get this done faster."

"That’d be great.", replied Bea.

"Alright, we’re back!", called the other Bea as she approached with supplies in hand, both Germs following close behind, "Let’s get started."

As the Greggs and Angus’ walked by the Food Donkey, they saw both Loris talking to each other. Our Lori was showing off her enhanced heart powers and the size of the aura created caught everyone off guard.

"Wow, Lori! That is incredible!", Gregg exclaimed.

"Heh, if you think that’s cool, then watch this." Lori took a deep breath and reached deep into the
depths of her soul. The aura grew smaller, but many times brighter, before becoming completely still around her body.

“Try to punch me.”, demanded Lori.

“Are you sure? It didn’t go so well last time.”, Gregg argued.

“I’m sure. Come at me.”

“Okay.” Gregg ran and attempted to punch Lori in the arm but he felt his hand come to a sudden stop as he touched the aura, which was like a thin plating at this point.

Gregg blinked, “What?”

“Cool, huh?”

“How did you get it to do that?”

“If I’m going to explain that, I’ll need to get philosophical.”

“That’s fine. It’s like that for all of our powers.”

“Okay. So, basically, the reason my heart was weak before was that I was only thinking about the soul superficially. I failed to realize that the reason our hearts are strong is because of what we find deep within us. After an incident, I had in my sixth gate, I realized that we’re all connected in that we have motives, goals, desires. I got to thinking, why did I want to become powerful? So I could protect my friends. Why did I want to protect my friends? Because they would do the same for me. Why would they protect me? Because they knew I would do the same for them. That underlying desire to help those we care about is our driving force and I’m able to amplify that tremendously.”

“That makes a lot of sense.”, replied Angus.

“I’m so happy you were able to discover yourself!”, added Gregg.

“Me, too, but I know I can still dig deeper. My full potential will come once I reach the base on which all hearts rely, the force that empowers all of us in its purest form.”

“That sounds really hard. Should I be trying to do that?”, wondered Gregg.

“I don’t think you’re supposed to try and make breakthroughs in your aspect. I’m fairly certain it was made to come naturally as we make progress as people, like when you learned to stop hating yourself or when I remembered that we should continue to fight despite the odds.”, answered Angus.

“Wouldn’t that be more heart or hope?”, asked Lori.

“I think that the point of my classpect is to not let it control me. It’s easy to think you have all of the answers when you’re a mage and so, you neglect other aspects.”

“That makes sense.”

“Guys, how many more times are we going to get all mushy and philosophical on this adventure?”,
complained Gregg.

Angus gave a smirk, “We still have one last battle where we’ll be together, assuming we win. There are certainly some opportunities there.”

“Could we not? I’ve had enough feels for life at this point. That’s including the immortality! Also, can we go skating, already?”

“You’re doing that again?”, Lori questioned.

“Yeah. It’s our last day here if we win tomorrow and I want to give a good sendoff to Casey.”

“Did you bring the boards?”, asked the other Lori.

Gregg dropped the boards out of his captchalogue onto the ground.

“Alright, then. Are you sure we should be doing this without Germ?”

“We’ll be fine. All I want is to do something that would make Casey proud before we finally avenge him.”

“I think he’d already be proud of you.”, said Angus as he placed a hand on his lover’s shoulder.

“Maybe you’re right, but I still want to do this.”

Gregg stood on his board and got used to riding around on it for a bit and then tried some minor tricks. He needed to work his confidence back up before he attempted anything major again.

“Is there any deeper meaning behind this skateboard trick? Sure, it was Casey’s go-to move for winning competitions or simply showing off, but other than that, it just seems like a normal trick. The only reason it was special to you guys was probably because no one else in town was nearly as good as him.”, Lori inquired.

“There’s more to it than that. Yes, it is just a normal skate move, but I want to be able to do it to make up for the fact that I wasn’t there to do it when he was alive. The reason he wanted us to skate with him was because there was no actual competition and he couldn’t leave Possum Springs because his family was poor and they couldn’t afford a car. Mae and I gave up on it too fast. Now, we’ll never get another chance to do that one extra thing that we’d give anything to have with him.”

“I wish I spent more time with him, too. We just never had that much in common besides being friends with you. It was the same with Mae until we went stargazing and I suddenly decided to hand her my life story on a silver platter. I’m glad I did that. It gives us more common ground. We all have it, don’t we?”

“Have what?”

“We’ve all had traumatic experiences in our lives. I had my parents, you had the sheep, Bea had her mom dying, Mae had the shapes, and all of us felt the loss of Casey. Us four all had that in common and now that we’ve opened up to each other, we’re closer than ever before. Our minds have all been afflicted with death and loss, so we take solace in each other.”
“Now that I think about it, that makes sense.”, Gregg agreed.

“I think that town just attracted sadness. I’m glad we’re able to work to be free of it, even if billions of people died for it.”, Lori added.

Angus looked up to the sky, “If we hadn’t gotten pulled into this game, it wouldn’t have stopped all of those people from dying. We were only fortunate enough to get this chance because of John. I wonder why he chose us. If I could see him, I could read his mind but we still don’t even know what he looks like.”

“We can ask him what he looks like when we win. We’ll add that to the list of things to look forward to when we win tomorrow.”, said Gregg.

“Yeah, that would be nice.”

“What is that?!”, yelled Lori as she pointed towards the main part of town. They saw a giant parade float slowly moving at them.

“Mallard?”, Gregg blurted out.

“We should go check it out.”, recommended the other Gregg as he rode to it, everyone following close behind. They came up to a steep hill and stopped at the edge. Now able to get a better look at it, Maes, Beas, Germs, and a Bombshell were visible around it. Germ was messing with some sort of contraption with multiple buttons on it.

When Mae saw the rest of her friends, she flew to them, “Hey, guys! We fixed Mallard! Isn’t it great?”

“It’s cool, but why did you do it?”, wondered Gregg.

“This will be our last chance to live out our childhood memories. I wanted to make it count. We’ll have the responsibility of caring for an entire universe after tomorrow. I see you’re still trying to skate. How’s it going?”

“Fine. It’s all for Casey.”

Mae came down and pat Gregg on the back. All of a sudden, he began to roll forward. Due to being on the edge of a hill, gravity brought Gregg barreling down. He couldn’t stop himself and panicked as he came at Mallard at high speeds. At the last second, he jumped up and flung a blast of wind beneath him, propelling him up fast enough to clear the float as the skateboard rolled under it.

Germ decided that now would be a good time to set off the fireworks. As Gregg passed over Mallard’s head, small explosions sounded around him. Once he reached the other side, gravity took over again and he began to fall. At first, Gregg thought about simply flying, but that would be giving up a great opportunity to land one of the most unique tricks that had ever been done in the world of skating. Slowing himself down with some more gusts of wind, he managed to stick a perfect landing on his board before skidding to a halt.

Everyone applauded Gregg on his performance and ran over to congratulate him

“Wow, that was great!” Mae cheered.
“That was cool, wasn’t it?”, replied Gregg.

Germ gave a friendly smile, “That may not have been Casey’s favorite move, but I think he would’ve loved it all the same. One of his catchphrases was ‘skate to create’, after all, and you just created a new move.”

“I did do that. It almost makes me sad, though. It means our time together is almost over.”

“It’s not over yet! Come on, let’s all ride Mallard together!”, exclaimed Mae.

“You better not do it without me.”, said our Bombshell.

“What took you so long?

“Flying through space takes time, okay? Anyways, are we going to do this or not?”

“Yeah, let’s go!”

Everyone got on Mallard and rode together for the rest of the night. Overall, it was a good way to say goodbye to everyone. They all went to sleep content with the time they had spent together and ready for what tomorrow would bring.
Chapter 14

Today would be the final day. Looking back, it was hard to believe it had only been a little over a week since they had started. It felt much longer than that to everyone. As it turns out, universe-altering games can be quite draining.

MB: Alright, guys. This is it. The final push begins now. Are we ready?

Everyone said yes.

MB: Also, before we go, everyone should have their sprite-summoning medallion. Every fighter counts.

AD: I think we’ve all gotten ours by now.

GL: I keep on forgetting I have that.

GT: I want to warn you; The denizens are forces to be reckoned with. In some cases, fighting them may not be the best option.

LM: Can we not fight them?

GT: In most cases, I would say yes, but seeing as you’re all on a time limit, I don’t think we can afford not to fight them.

BS: That sucks. I’m not exactly the best fighter.

MB: What are you talking about? You have floating knives! I think you’ll be fine.

GT: You should all be fine as long as you don’t do anything stupid.

AD: I know this may sound random, but before we go, is there any way for us to see what you look like?

GT: Actually, we’ve been working on that technology for a while. We have a prototype. I’ll go get it.

A few moments later, a strange figure appeared on everyone’s screens.

GT: The voice functionality isn’t working, yet, but we can at least see each other.

MB: You’re an alien?!

GT: I guess we would be to you. You certainly are to me.

GL: You only have fur on your head? It must really suck when it gets cold out.

GT: I am sort of jealous. Jade actually has dog ears, but that’s it.

AD: Who’s that behind you?
John looked behind him. Standing there, was a person similar to John but with gray skin and stubby horns. John waved and mouthed what looked like ‘hello’, followed by what was probably a name. He ushered the gray being over to the computer and he reluctantly followed. He looked bewildered by what he was seeing on the screen.

GT: This is Karkat!

John and Karkat seemed to bicker back and forth for a bit. Eventually, Karkat begrudgingly began typing on the keyboard.

GT: HELLO, WALKING FUZZ COCOONS. AS YOU KNOW, DUE TO MY COMPANION’S FLAGRANT DROPPING OF MY NAME, I AM KARKAT. JOHN INSISTS THAT I TALK TO YOU, SO HERE I AM.

MB: Uh, hello then.

BS: Walking fuzz cocoons?

GT: OH, I APOLOGIZE. I DIDN’T REALIZE WE HAD A CONSORT PLAYER AMONGST US. FORGIVE ME FOR NOT NOTICING YOU IN THIS CROWD OF FLUFF CREATURES.

BS: What’s a consort?

John seemed to be reprimanding Karkat for being rude and began typing.

GT: Sorry about this. He gets worked up easily.

BS: Really? I couldn’t tell.

Karkat began wrestling the keyboard from John. Another gray person suddenly walked in. Her horns were longer than Karkat’s and pointier. She wore a dress and lipstick. When she saw the quarrel occurring in front of her, she facepalmed and went to break up the fight. They could be seen arguing, occasionally pointing at the screen until the new girl touched something behind the screen.

“You’d better be FUCKING kidding me, John! How in the ever-living FUCK did you not think to flip the voice switch?!” Karkat yelled at John while waving his arms around.

“I can’t read your strange troll language. I thought that might make it blow up or something. Also, you didn’t think to flip the switch either.”

“First of all, Blow it up? Oh, my fucking god, how can you be so dumb? I’m the dumb one, so stop being such a moron! Second, I didn’t check for a voice switch because you told me it wasn’t working, which, as we can all clearly see, is not even close to being the tiniest bit true! You aren’t a hope player, John! Believing in something hard enough will not make it fucking true!”, Karkat ranted on while continually pointing an accusatory finger at John’s chest.

The other ‘troll’ started to speak up, “Karkat, calm down. We won’t get anywhere by shouting at each other.”

“How can you not take my side on this, Kanaya?! This imbecil actually thought that you would
build in a switch that would blow up our only way to talk to other people besides typing!”

“"To be fair, you did take the word of a human on troll technology.”

“"Well, excuse me for thinking he’d been with us long enough to be able to flip a goddamn switch!”

“"It doesn’t matter anymore, okay? There are people sitting there watching you scream your lungs out over an alien race not being able to read our language. Besides, what if one of the grubs walked in and heard you talking like that? Young minds are very impressionable and the use of this language in any capacity around them could be detrimental to their growth.”

“Okay, okay, you're right.”, Karkat took a deep breath to calm himself, “Sorry about being an obnoxious prick. I guess I probably didn’t give off the best first impressions, huh?”

“"Can you hear us?”, asked Mae.

“"Yeah, we’ve always been able to hear you. It’s just now, we can have everyone together in a voice chat.”, John replied.

“Wait, does that mean you’ve heard all of our mega angsty conversations with each other?”

“"I tend to keep out of that sort of thing. You deserve your privacy.”

“Good, because the levels of angst are through the roof in this session!”, exclaimed Gregg.

“Trust me, the angst was real with us, too.”

Angus wanted to clear some things up, “So, you’re John, his name is Karkat, and I think I heard Kanaya, am I correct?”

“Yeah, that about covers it.”

“Another question, what are you and what are they? What are your races called?”

“I’m a human and these two are trolls.”

“As much as I would like to know more about your races, it’ll have to wait until later. We need to get going soon. I do have one last question.”

“What is it?”

“I heard them mention ‘grubs’, which I’m assuming are troll offspring. I’m also going to assume that they didn’t intend to rebuild the troll population all on their own. So, I was wondering if maybe, you used ectobiology to create children?”

“You would actually be correct. We created thousands of grubs and human babies and gave them to the survivors of the war to take care of. Any prospitans or dersites left after the war will be put in the new universe. They will no longer be hostile as they have nothing left to fight over. They make good enough parents for the first generation and then it all becomes normal from there.”, Kanaya explained.

“Could we keep any of the babies for ourselves?”, questioned Gregg.
“Of course! If fatherhood is what you want, then go for it! I must remind you of your immortality, though. You will outlive your children if you decide to raise some.”

“It’s fine. It’ll be worth it if Angus and I can give them the childhood they deserve.”

“I wish you luck in that, then.”

“Well, it was nice meeting you all. I hope we get to talk again soon after we’re finally done with SBURB. I wish we had more time to talk, but we need to get going. If things don’t go as planned, it was great getting to meet you.”, said Mae as she went to turn her laptop off.

“Goodbye! I’ll look forward to getting to know you better once this is all over, too! You’ll make it, I promise!”, John managed to get out before Mae left the chat, soon followed by everyone else.

Mae went downstairs and found her granddad at the front door.

“Hi, Mae.”

“Hi, granddad.”

“So, this is it, huh?”

“Hopefully.”

“Are you sure you’re ready?”

“It doesn’t matter if I am or not. This needs to happen now.”

“Yeah, I figured as much. Please, let me fight Eide with you.”

“Of course. It would be cruel of me not to let you fight. Eide needs to pay.”

“Thank you. It means a lot to me.”

“No problem.”

“Good luck with your denizen.”

“Thanks. I’ll be back after the fight to grab my ultimate weapon and to set up my grist rig.”

“Love you.”

“Love you, too.”

Mae began her second to last flight up her house. Passing every floor brought back memories of the events of the past week. By the time the peak of the house was reached, Mae had pumped herself up to an extreme. She told herself that all of the work they put in wouldn’t go to waste.

Passing through the gate brought Mae to a dark, cave-like area. The air was damp and suffocating. A draft could be felt from various directions. Once Mae’s eyes adjusted to the light, she could see the hole in front of her. It was huge, just like the one from the mines. Was this what this was? A
representation of everything that happened when she returned to Possum Springs. Mae knew what
she had to do. She jumped into the hole, into everything she feared.

After some indiscernible amount of time, Mae landed on something. She could feel flesh and
scales. These were consorts that had sacrificed themselves to the hole. There was no meaning to
their deaths, just like Casey. That thought angered Mae. The thought of people dying for no reason
drove her into a frenzy as she ran in what she hoped was the right direction.

Eventually, Mae reached a large circular room. In the middle, a colossal, serpentine creature laid
unmoving. Mae began to hear its voice in her head.

*I am Nyssa. Are you ready?*

Mae didn’t respond, instead opting to charge the denizen, landing a blow to its head. Electricity
crackled from her weapon. A shockwave was sent out, knocking Mae far back and into a second
strike from Nyssa’s tail. Mae was shot to the ground and she groaned as she stood. She was barely
able to dodge a huge purple laser which was shot from Nyssa’s mouth.

Mae began to steal rage from Nyssa and was surprised to find that there was none. How could this
monster that was clearly attacking her not have any anger? Struggling to dodge more attacks, Mae
was desperate to find another solution. Her original attack did nothing and without rage, any
consecutive hits would be just as ineffective.

It was only a matter of time before Mae was hit by an energy blast and sent flying into a wall. She
felt pathetic. She couldn’t do anything for herself. Without her friends, she was powerless. Without
the rage of others, she was weak. There were times where Mae had somehow summoned obscene
amounts of rage from somewhere, but where was it?

Thinking back on recent events, Mae seemed to become powerful during fights with Eide. Why
was that? In most cases, she went into a rage when someone died. Was that it? Could she only
become powerful if she sacrificed her friends? Was there some way to summon that strength
without them?

Mae suddenly realized that she could produce her own rage. If she became angry about something,
she could steal it from herself. Luckily, Mae was still fuming from the thought of Casey’s
meaningless death. Ripping the anger from herself, she gained the best of the worlds of anger and
calm. She had all of the strength that came with rage as well as the rationality and critical thinking
that came with a calm mind. The most noticeable things about her, though, were her eyes. Her eyes
were void of empathy and mercy. They were true nightmare eyes.

Mae walked towards Nyssa slowly, deflecting various blows and applying minimal effort to
dodging attacks that couldn’t be blocked. She held her bat with only one hand, saving her second
for if she needed to get serious. Once below the denizen’s head, Mae flew up and swung her bat in
a wide arc, a satisfying crack resonating from the impact of the bat followed by the crackle and
buzz of more electricity.

Nyssa growled in pain and went to send out another shockwave, but Mae was unfazed by it. She
continued sending out shockwaves. She needed Mae to be pushed back, but she wouldn’t budge.
Mae swung again, hitting her denizen’s face once more. Mae dodged a series of lasers and smacked
Nyssa a few more times before becoming angrier. She was bored, and the irritation was enough to
make her want to finish the battle.
Two hands were now placed on her bat. It was time to end this. Mae’s iron grip threatened to snap the handle of the high-end weapon. Mae flew at Nyssa, dodging a few last-minute attempts to stop her. They were futile in the end, as Mae’s bat crashed into Nyssa’s skull. The resulting grist explosion was mesmerizing.

With nothing to direct her anger towards, Mae felt her energy drain away, leaving her feeling like an empty husk. There was no more anger, and in turn, no will to fight. Mae dragged herself around to pick up all of the grist that had been dropped before heading back home to recover before the final encounter.

Bea entered her gate and it brought her to a clearing with a huge fort in the center. Monsters swarmed the surrounding area but Bea could kill them easily with her flying knives. Bea kicked down the front entrance and flew through the halls of the stronghold. It was like a maze and after about ten minutes of trying different paths, she reached a large central room. Sitting inside was another serpentine creature. It was blood red and bleeding. There was a layer of blood on the ground at Bea’s feet.

“What’s your name?”, asked Bea, pointing her main knife at the denizen.

*It is Armok. Do what you came here to do.*

“Fine.”, Bea sent forth a barrage of knives and used Bloody Crescendo. Blood went everywhere. Armok began absorbing the blood and his wounds closed on their own. Bea attacked again with another barrage, this time flying in with her main knife as well. Armok pulled in blood from all around the room and hardened it around him. He then exploded the solidified blood, sending shards and chunks everywhere. Bea was fortunate enough not to take any immediately fatal damage, but the wounds would kill her if she didn’t heal them right away.

Pillars of blood shot up from the ground, forcing Bea into dodging instead of healing. She wasn’t sure what to do. The bleeding was making her feel lightheaded. It wouldn’t be long before she passed out from blood loss. Bea did the only thing she could think of and tried using the blood covering the ground to keep herself alive.

Bea immediately realized what she did wrong when waves of pain racked her body and she felt it begin to shut down. This was basic biology. You can’t receive blood from someone with the wrong blood type. It didn’t help that she had O- blood. Somehow, she doubted that mattered when taking in denizen blood.

With death even closer than before, Bea knew she needed to purify the blood somehow. Would that be included in her powers? She assumed it would and began to lose herself in what could be described as an out-of-body experience. She became one with the denizen for a moment as she managed to cleanse the godly blood. The blood still belonged to the denizen but it was in her, now.

Bea was back in the fight, but there was still the problem of Armok healing himself. He was in the middle of doing it again when Bea tried pulling the blood away from him. To her surprise, it was working. Having his blood in her made it easier to control. Bea tried using the same technique he had used earlier to harden the blood into a stone-like quality. She managed to create a large chunk of blood. After breaking the rock into multiple shards, she threw them at Armok. This, combined with her knives and earlier wounds, was enough to cause a noticeable change in the denizen’s state of health.

The fight was coming close to having a victor. All Bea needed to do was burst Armok down the
rest of the way. The godly blood was certainly helping. Bea shot up two giant spikes of blood from
the ground and exploded them while they were inside him, rupturing his insides and dealing the
finishing blow. Grist rained everywhere. Bea collected them and returned home through an exit
portal that opened up.

Gregg appeared in a pitch-black area. Something was wrong with the air. It weighed down on him
and made his breathing labored. He had felt something similar to this in minuscule amounts while
on his planet, but he thought that was just the darkness messing with his brain. Now, it was clear
that something had infected his planet with this darkness.

Gregg pushed forward, ignoring the fact that even walking was a chore in this black miasma. After
trudging along for some time, Gregg reached a door. He pushed on it, but it wouldn’t budge. There
were lines etched in the door that led to Gregg’s aspect symbol. He gave the door some breath and
it opened, a flood of darkness pouring outwards. Gregg could hardly walk, but he went into the
room anyway.

Inside, was Typheus, the breath denizen. He sensed that Gregg would only fight him, so he didn’t
bother with words. Instead, he opened with a tail swipe. Gregg tried to fly out of the way, but he
wasn’t fast enough. He was hit directly in the stomach. Under most circumstances, he could
recover fine from a single blow like this, but the darkness suffocated him, making it next to
impossible to recover his breath.

Gregg tried to steal the breath from Typheus, but his flow was disrupted by the miasma. Next, he
tried to throw his own wind at the denizen, but it dissipated almost as soon as it exited him. He did
notice something, though. The air in front of him became clear for a moment when he shot wind
into it. This could be how to win. Gregg just hoped he had enough in him to clear a path between
him and Typheus.

Gregg began drawing everything he could from himself to put into this next attack. He took a deep
breath and let out a grunt as he drilled through the air with his wind. He could clearly see Typheus.
When Typheus attempted a second tail swipe, Gregg flew forward through the path he made. It
was closing fast, so Gregg stole what he could from Typheus and let loose another gust of wind.
He was closing the distance, and soon, he was able to touch the denizen. He placed his hand on his
head and ripped out a massive amount of breath.

The first problem that needed addressing was the contaminated air. Gregg sent out a burst of wind
all around him powerful enough to clear the room. He then attacked with a flurry of knife blows
with wind blasts spliced in. A windstorm swept across the room. This one was from Tyheus.
Gregg struggled against the wind with his own, allowing Tyheus to sneak in a tail swipe from
behind and knock Gregg into the thick of the storm. The wind sent Gregg back towards the
denizen, who created another windstorm going in the opposite direction.

The opposing winds created a tornado of colossal size, and Gregg was stuck in the middle of it.
Luckily, he found his way to the eye of the storm quickly. Tyheus was flying around in the
tornado and attempting to ram into Gregg. Gregg, instead of dodging, flew directly above him and
stuck his knives into his head, riding him around like a bull and using the wind to pull him back,
leaving a long cut as he went.

When Gregg reached the end of Tyheus’ tail, he jumped off and propelled himself back with his
wind, following the flow of the tornado, until he came back around to Tyheus. This time,
however, he intended to fly directly into the denizen. He accelerated himself as much as he could
with his wind and plunged both of his daggers into the denizen’s face, causing him to explode into
a mountain of grist and revealing an exit portal.

Gregg returned home, and the reality of the situation dawned on him. This was the end. It was either live or die. If things didn’t work out, Gregg wanted to die with no regrets. As he went to his alchemy equipment, he messaged John.

GL: Would you happen to have the code for a ring?

GT: What kind of ring?

GL: An engagement ring.

Angus found himself in some icy ruins. Icicles hung from the ceiling and the floor was made of ice, forcing him to fly through. As he explored deeper, despite how normal weather works, a blizzard was forming. It started off as a light snow but grew to a storm after around ten minutes. Angus had to cover his face and he was glad when he saw a room without a blizzard raging inside.

When he entered the room, it turned out to be much bigger than he was expecting. Another thing that he had anticipated slightly more was the presence of his denizen, Metis. This was once again a snake-like creature, but this one had a mask. It was solid white with two slits where the eyes should be.

Angus didn’t give Metis a chance to speak before activating Cerebral Cadenza. Angus saw a path where he could shoot the ground to create a smokescreen and use it to get behind Metis. When he attempted this, something was off. He created the smokescreen, but when he went to flank Metis, she shot an energy beam down. Angus barely stopped in front of it but was blinded by the resulting water vapor.

Angus attempted the fraymotif again, this time opting for a more direct approach. He saw that he could aim a few precise blasts at the denizen’s eyes while avoiding counterattacks. He put the plan into action, only to be stopped in his tracks by a swing of Metis’ tail. It wasn’t where it was supposed to be. He saw things differently than how they happened. Could Metis read his mind?

Angus stopped using the fraymotif after seeing that it wasn’t working. He instead started flying around and firing off magic blasts when he could. Metis always seemed to be able to dodge, and Angus kept finding that the beams being fired back at him were a bit too well placed.

This was similar to the earlier fight Angus was in with the trio of bosses that were too fast for his mind powers. Angus tried to use the same mindset he had used back then. He let his mind go blank and depended on his instincts to survive. He immediately noticed a shift in the fight. If there were no thoughts, Metis couldn’t read them. The only problem was that Angus wasn’t used to fighting this way. His moment-to-moment fighting was dull compared to his mental warfare.

Metis, at one point, hit Angus into the air with her tail. Angus barely managed to stop himself from flying straight into some icicles hanging from the ceiling. He saw an opportunity and fired a shot into the ceiling, causing it to shake violently. Icicles began raining down. Metis, even though she saw this coming, was powerless to stop it. She managed to destroy a few with magic, but many icy spikes drove themselves into her.

Angus saw that Metis was distracted by the ice and dived in for a barrage of lasers. He stuck his wands into Metis and sustained a beam that slowly bore into her. Metis was becoming slightly desperate. She fired a laser at Angus, which he dodged, sending it into her body. That was enough
to finish the job. Metis disappeared in a flash and grist flew everywhere.

Angus returned home and found Gregg at the front door, standing with his hands behind his back. When he saw Angus approach, his ears drooped down and he began to blush.

“Hey, bug. What’s up?”, Angus greeted.

“Uh, I just wanted to come see you one last time before we go and fight the black king and Eide.”, replied Gregg nervously, his eyes darting around a bit.”

“Thanks. It means a lot to me that you would come here to see me before we leave. I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

Angus knew Gregg was up to something. Perhaps, it was a gift. Angus restrained himself from extracting the answer from his mind. Gregg probably wanted to surprise him with something.

“What do you have behind your back?”, inquired Angus.

Gregg suddenly shrank back a bit and his breathing became shakier, I know that we might not make it through this, so I wanted to do something I’ve been meaning to do. I don’t want to die with regrets, so here I go.”, Gregg laughed a bit at the end to try and take the edge off, but it didn’t help. His stomach felt like it was about to explode and his heart was racing a mile a minute.

Gregg took a few steps forward and got down on one knee, keeping the black box he had concealed behind his back. Angus realized what was going on and shock began to cover his face.

“Angus Delaney,” Gregg pulled the box from behind him and opened it, “Will you marry me?” Gregg was crying out of both fear and hope, yet he still managed to keep a smile on his face.

Angus stood there for a moment, trying to keep himself from crying, but failing miserably.

“Of course, I’ll marry you.”, Angus walked up and hugged Gregg. Relief washed over Gregg and joy filled both of their hearts.

“Come on, try on the ring!”, urged Gregg as he wiped the tears from his face. Angus extended his arm out and let Gregg slip the ring onto his finger. It fit perfectly. The ring was made of silver and there was an arrangement of diamonds on top that looked like a galaxy.

“It’s beautiful.”

“I had it look like a galaxy because you’re the center of my galaxy, no, my entire universe.”

“That’s so sweet. I love it, though, not nearly as much as I love you.”

“Awww, I love you, too, cap’n.”

They nuzzled together and looked up to Skaia.

“Do you think we can do it? Can we really win?”, questioned Gregg.

Angus held up the ring, “Eide may have both rings, but I have this ring, and it’s better than anything Eide could possibly have. We can win, I promise.”

“Thanks, that makes me feel a lot better just hearing you say that.”
“Glad to help.”

Someone messaged the group chat.

“I guess it’s almost time. I should probably go do some last-minute alchemy.”

“Alright, that’s fine.”

“One last kiss for the road?”

“I’d be glad to.”

Germ was fighting Nyx and making short work of her, too. All he had to do was allow the void to consume everything. In order to use his powers, he had to feel empty inside. He had spent his time mastering this ability and now, he could clear his soul of any emotion at will. It was part of why he always seemed so enigmatic and laid back. Nyx tried to fight back using the void for herself, but Germ was already empty inside. It was only a matter of time before the void consumed Nyx. Sadly, it took the grist with it, but with Selmers, he knew it didn’t matter.

Selmers’ fight against Hephaestus was also an easy one. All she had to do was stop time and wail on him until he eventually died. He had a hammer that was left behind called the Fear No Anvil. Selmers picked it up, even though she couldn’t use it.

Bombshell’s denizen was the strangest. Her denizen was Echidna. Her upper half was a humanoid form with giant quills on its back. The rest of her was the typical snake tail. Bombshell was prepared for a fight, but Echidna didn’t attempt to fight back. Instead, it gave Bombshell a message.

have been tasked with the upbringing of a new universe, and you have done well. You may claim your reward without resistance from me.

She lowered her head to just below Bombshell, waiting for her to kill her, which she did. Bombshell took the Deringer and sliced clean through Echidna’s head. She collected the grist and noticed one of Echidna’s quills on the ground. She picked it up and stored it for later. It might be useful for some alchemy.

Lori was given the hardest fight out of anyone. When she entered the chamber of her denizen, she noticed a long, winding path. She walked along, expecting it to lead her to the denizen, but was surprised when the ground beneath her shook and came to life.

Her denizen’s name was Yaldabaoth. His head looked like a depiction of the sun. He was larger than any other denizen. He was the denizen reserved for the strongest of warriors and the only one not tied to an aspect.

Lori didn’t know any of this, however. She placed a heart shield around herself and flew at the denizen. Yaldabaoth let out a roar and dozens of lasers were fired out of its mouth and eyes. One hit Lori, and her barrier shattered. She put up another one and charged again, learning from last time. She dodged the mass of lasers and swung her spirit chain into his head. Sparks flew, and Lori was unable to penetrate the denizen’s defenses. Lori continued to push, hoping she would break through and was horrified when her weapon snapped in half.

Lori’s heart was broken and her barrier disappeared. She pulled out her chainchete and spirit machete and desperately tried to do any damage at all, but all that happened was they broke, too. All she had left was her normal machete from the start of the game. The fight was hopeless at this point.
John watched on as this was the last fight before the final boss. He was astonished that the game would give Lori Yaldabaoth. He didn’t think she was powerful enough to warrant a fight with him, and it was being made clear that this was the case as Lori was reduced to the image of a frightened and desperate mouse.

Lori tried to remind herself of what gave her heart.

do you fight?

Because I need to be there for my friends.

Do they really need you? Everyone else has probably killed their denizens already. You’re still too weak.

No, I can’t think like that. It’ll get me killed.

Do you really think that friendship and believing in yourself are enough to win? Grow up, already!

I won’t win if I don’t try.

Why try if you aren’t going to win?

Stop, please! I’m not going to die!

There’s nothing you can do about it. It’ll be easier if you accept it.

No, I won’t!

Why not?

I don’t know. I just can’t die here.

Then fight.

Lori steeled herself and flew at Yaldabaoth. She wrapped her machete in heart magic and swung without breaking her weapon.

that’s it. Keep going.

She thrust forward. Nothing happened, but she kept going. The denizen eventually shot a laser at Lori’s hand, knocking the machete away.

not over, yet. I won’t let it be.

Loir tried to feel as empowered as possible, which was hard considering how she hadn’t done any damage to the boss. She channeled her energy into her fist and threw a punch, pumping all of the heart forward at the moment of impact. A loud crack sounded as Lori’s arm reeled back from the force of the punch. She clutched her hand in agony. Her bones had shattered. Lori groaned at the pain and fought to hold back tears.

ed more heart. Where can I get more?

To get more, you need to dig deeper. Why can’t you die?

Because I need to be there for my friends.
Wrong. Why can’t you die?

I don’t know.

That’s not good enough.

I’m sorry, okay. I just don’t want to die.

Why don’t you want to die?

I want to be alive.

What does it mean to be alive?

To not be dead?

If that’s all being alive means to you, it’s no wonder you can’t gather the strength to fight for it. We all will die one day. Why can’t it be today?

There’s still so much I need to do. I can’t leave yet.

I thought all there was to being alive was not being dead?

I was wrong. I have things to do, people to do those things with. I can’t give it up so easily.

Why not?

I only get one life. I won’t let it be taken away from me.

One last question. You’ve thought a lot about what you don’t want. What do you want?

“I want to live!”

Lori felt the weight of everything that would be taken from her if she lost. A pink glow enveloped her, creating a field of heart. It grew larger and larger, threatening to consume anything that entered. Yaldabaoth fired lasers at the field, but the disintegrated as they entered the ball of pure energy surrounding Lori. Driven by the one thing all living things are driven by, the ball engulfed the room, along with Yaldabaoth, and all of his grist.

There was one problem that came with this growing ball of pure heart. It didn’t stop growing after Yaldabaoth was dead. A large chunk of Lori’s planet was being consumed. John saw this and called up Bombshell.

GT: Bombshell, we have a problem.

Bs: What’s going on?

GT: You need to get Lori away from her planet, now! Put her somewhere she won’t be able to damage anything.

Bombshell didn’t question John’s judgment. She flew to Lori’s planet at just below lightspeed and the sight that she witnessed filled her with a mixture of fear and empowerment. She shook it off long enough to move Lori somewhere deep in space but was mesmerized by how good she felt after it was done. Everyone looked up and saw the large, pink dot in the sky, and looking at it somehow filled everyone with determination.
Lori’s power finally subsided, revealing an unconscious mouse floating powerlessly in the medium. Bombshell took her home and handed her to her mother. After that, she messaged everyone.

Bs: Is everyone ready?

MB: I can’t explain why, but I feel readier than I’ve ever felt before.

GL: Same. It was so weird. Angus and I saw a pink ball in the sky, and we just felt better about everything.

Bs: I think that was Lori. She finally unlocked her full potential.

GL: That’s great! She’ll be a huge help against Eide.

Bs: I wouldn’t count on that.

GL: Why not?

Bs: She was completely drained when I found her. I don’t think she’ll wake up until after we’ve finished the game.

GL: Aw, man! That sucks!

AD: At least she gave us that last confidence boost we needed to finish this once and for all.

BS: It really is amazing what she can do.

MB: Alright, guys. We may not have Lori, but I know we can do this. Who’s ready to finish Eide and make a new universe?!
Chapter 15

Mae and the others did some last-minute alchemy with their god tier clothes. They now had weapons of legendary status. Mae had the Indignation Slugger, a bat that increased in power the angrier Mae was. Gregg had the Tempest Blades, a set of daggers, one longer than the other, which could send waves of wind out with each swing if needed. Bea made the Bloodletter, which could manipulate blood on the same level Bea could when she still had Armok’s blood in her system. Angus created the Perpetual Synapses, which gave Angus the ability to direct his magic attacks well after they’ve left the wands, allowing for more cunning and misdirection. Germ created a massive pile of null bombs, bombs that would create mini black holes for a few moments, as well as other less destructive explosives. Selmers received the Aeon Marksman, a sniper with bullets that travel through time to the moment they hit a target, effectively making the impact instantaneous. Selmers, instead of using her god tier clothes, decided to use the quill she picked up from Echidna, creating Echidna’s Rapier. She kept the Deringer to use on Eide, but she had a feeling this would be her main weapon.

GT: Before you go, you need to pump your remaining grist into Skaia. The genesis frog is ready, right?

Bs: Yes, we’re set to go.

GT: Alright. In the phernalia registry, you should find a grist rig. Place it on top of your houses and transfer all of your grist into Skaia. Make sure you don’t want to make anything else before you do it.

MB: It looks like everyone except for Lori is good.

GT: That’s fine. You should still have enough to feed the genesis frog.

Bs: The grist feeds the genesis frog?

GT: Yes. It needs to grow before it can become a new universe.

Bs: That makes sense.

AD: So, the frog itself is the universe?

GT: Yes. Once it is grown, you can claim the universe as your own.

AD: I guess our astronomers weren’t far off when they depicted a whale as carrying the world on its back. They just got the animal wrong.

MB: Wow, I almost forgot about that.

GL: Stargazing with Angus is so cool. Wasn’t it great?

MB: The childhood abuse stories got me a bit down but I’m glad it happened.

AD: Sorry if I made you uncomfortable.

MB: Don’t be! I said I was glad it happened. I feel like we grew a lot closer then.

AD: Me, too.
BS: Guys, as team mom, I am obligated to remind you that our time limit is still in place and we still don’t have a clue when it will reach zero.

GL: Ugh, mom, why do you always have to ruin our fun?

BS: I’m just doing my job as team mom.

GL: Mae, why did you tell her she could be team mom?

MB: She does have a point. We should get going.

GL: Fine, but only because I want to kick Eide’s ass.

AD: Wait, before we go, just one last thing. Should I tell them or do you want to, Gregg?

GL: Can I tell them?!

AD: Go ahead, bug.

MB: Tell us what?

GL: WE’RE ENGAGED!!!

MB: OMG, that’s so amazing! I’m so happy for you!

BS: I was wondering when someone would finally propose.

GW: Congratulations.

SF: Good for you! This would probably make for a great poem.

Bs: I haven’t known you for as long as anyone else here, but you two seem great for each other.

GT: I’m glad to see it worked out.

GL: Thank you so much for getting that ring made for me! It couldn’t have been easy.

GT: Actually, we’re still creating it. We just had future Dave come back and give us the finished product.

GL: You bent time just to get me an engagement ring? Thank you!

GT: Honestly, it’s no big deal. Time shenanigans are pretty normal around here.

GL: Still, it means a lot to me.

GT: We’re kinda used to making rings for people. You’d be surprised how many people decide to get engaged in SBURB.

MB: It is pretty romantic to get engaged just before a big fight where you could both die.

GT: That is true.

BS: Once again, team mom, time limit.

MB: Alright, geez. Let’s get going.
Mae flew up towards Skaia along with everyone else. When they got there, bodies littered the battlefield. The prospitans were clearly losing. Mae was the first to spot the black king. She stole rage from the remainder of both armies, channeling it into her weapon. The black king spotted her. He was a towering figure hundreds of times bigger than Mae and he wielded a giant, golden staff with an orb on top that looked like Skaia.

The black king swung his staff at Mae. She flew around and hit his finger with a loud thump and crack. Mae summoned her granddad to join the fight, and he managed to fly around and do minimal damage with his sprite magic.

Gregg was the next to arrive. Mae and he used their fraymotif to quickly drain the black king of a large amount of rage and breath. Mae’s granddad and them flew around and chipped away at their opponent. Selmers began sniping from a distance. To everyone else, it seemed like she was rapid firing, but she had actually slowed down time for everything but herself.

Soon, Angus was also there, adding his magic to the ranged support. Bea and Bombshell arrived and began helping Mae and Gregg with the close-range battle. Germ threw a null bomb at the black king’s legs, and he was brought to his knees. Germ then started throwing knives with explosives attached to them.

With everyone there, the black king was being overwhelmed. He decided then to up the ante. The Skaia orb on his staff became corrupted and he began launching powerful eldritch magic from it. Everyone was lucky enough to dodge the magic, as it would have killed or severely injured them if it had hit anywhere, and without a life player, there was no coming back.

When Selmers saw this, she switched the time stop from affecting everything but herself to only affecting the black king. This allowed everyone to go all out with their attacks and fraymotifs for a few seconds until the effect was broken by a wave attack coming from the staff.

Selmers reentered her rapid-fire mode. The black king fired a beam at Mae and Bombshell used her space powers to move her out of the way. Mae was disoriented for a moment, but she regained her bearings quickly and thanked Bombshell. Selmers had to push Bombshell out of the way of another beam because she was distracted.

After about fifteen minutes of slowly chipping away at the black king, he began to look weakened and desperate. He just couldn’t seem to do anything. These people were too strong. He couldn’t let down his people, and so, he would be forced to make the ultimate sacrifice.

He tapped his staff to the ground with the intention of blowing himself up and taking everyone with him. Selmers saw this and pulled Bombshell out of the slowed time state. Selmers was able to send the black king deep into space as he blew up, creating a spectacular light show for everyone in the area. That was the end of the black king.

For a few moments, everyone celebrated. They then got a message from John.

GT: Okay, we can continue with ending the game, but Eide is still out there. Don’t forget that. The last step to finishing the game would normally be to send the genesis frog into the center of Skaia, so go do that. You should be able to find a hole somewhere that you can put it in.

Everyone stuck together and found the hole John mentioned. Bombshell went up to throw the frog into the hole when Eide appeared out of nowhere and grabbed the genesis frog. He disintegrated it in his hand, throwing the ashes to the wind.

Everyone was too horrified to speak, so Eide spoke first.
“I told you I’d be here. I was worried you might’ve ruined my plan for a second, but I’m glad to see I made it just in time to crush the hope you had rising within you.”

Bombshell took out the derringer and swung, extending the blade to where Eide would have been, had he not teleported, at almost light speed.

“No.”, Eide said as he dodged effortlessly, “Not before I get to have my villainous monologue.”

The contempt in Bombshell’s eyes was searing, but she restrained herself.

“Good. Now, allow me to explain what’s going to happen in the next couple of minutes. I am going to fly into the center of Skaia. You will try to stop me. I will defeat you. I will take the grist stash for myself, along with the infinite creative potential of Skaia, and I will murder all of you in the most brutal ways I can come up with. After I’m done, I will move on to the dream bubbles, doing the same to all of them, until I’m satisfied with my revenge, which I never will be. Do you understand?”

“Are you done?”, asked Bombshell.

“Yes. You are free to try and stop me.”

Bombshell closed the hole and blitzed Eide, nearly hitting him a few times, but even at just below light speed, it wasn’t enough. Mae, Gregg, and Bea joined in as well, but Eide continued to casually dodge around. Even with Angus, Selmers, and Germ helping from a distance, it wasn’t good enough. When Eide grew bored, he sent out a shockwave, knocking everyone back.

“Is that really all you’ve got? What happened to that mouse girl? She seemed like she might’ve had some potential.”

“She couldn’t be here.”, stated Mae curtly.

“That’s a shame. She’s going to have to be the last to die. It sucks, really. No one wants to be the last one. It means you die all alone. Oh, well. That’s on her, I guess.”, replied Eide in a mocking tone.

“I wouldn’t want to disappoint you. Sorry I’m late. I ran into some problems getting here.”, Lori had arrived.

Earlier, Lori had woken up in the dream bubble. The first person she was herself.

“Hello, what are you doing here?”, she asked.

“What happened? Am I dead?”

“No. Did something happen?

“Did I defeat my denizen? Oh, no! I need to get out of here! They’re probably fighting Eide without me!”

“You can’t leave a dream bubble. It’s not possible. We’ve tried before.”

“It doesn’t matter. I need to.”

Lori ran outside hurriedly and flew towards where she knew Skaia was until she hit a barrier. She pushed against it and banged on it with everything she had to no avail.
“I told you. You can’t leave a dream bubble with your dream-self.”

“I don’t care! I need to be there!”

Remember what you are fighting for.

Lori felt the heart aura surrounding her as she pushed against the bubble. She needed to be there. She needed to fight. She couldn’t truly feel alive if they weren’t alive, if her friends weren’t alive. That need gave her power.

The aura grew tremendously, and the bubble began to shake. This was it! She was close! Just a little further. Lori groaned as she pushed harder, her heart guiding her forward. She felt it give way a bit more. The aura consumed her. She pushed even harder. Now, everyone in the bubble felt the tremors, and they looked up to see a pink, glowing ball pushing against the inside of the dream bubble.

The other Lori drew back nervously. The tremors had now become an earthquake. Somehow, none of the buildings had toppled. Suddenly, Lori felt a hand breakthrough, then another. Her arms slipped through. With one last push, her whole body broke through. Ripples traveled around the bubble, and the earthquake stopped.

The other Lori looked at her with shock and awe. Lori waved to her and flew towards Skaia. Soon, she arrived and was now confronting Eide.

“So, you’re the page. You start off as the weakest but become the strongest. The question is, which are you?”, Eide questioned.

“I’ll let you be the judge of that.” Lori waved a hand out and shielded everyone with a heart aura. “Bombshell, could I have the strongest sword you can spare?”

“Oh, sure.” She tossed Echidna’s Rapier to her and she caught it. It sported a white blade and guard with a purple handle.

“Hm, I’m not used to fighting with a rapier, but I guess I can figure it out.”

“Don’t be so cocky. I am a god. It’s going to take more than ‘figuring it out’ to defeat me.”, Eide warned.

“Like I said, I’ll let you be the judge of that.”

Lori struck first with incredible quickness. Eide dodged and shot magic into Lori. It bounced off of the heart barrier harmlessly and Lori attempted a few more jabs. They missed again, and Eide teleported behind Lori and stabbed her with an eldritch sword. It once again did nothing, but Lori had to focus her barrier to her back to fully block the blow. Eide noticed this and began teleporting around randomly in an attempt to catch her off guard. Lori parried and blocked a few blows with her sword, but a few hits managed to get through. They were all blocked by the heart barrier, though.

“Why aren’t we helping her?”, asked Gregg.

“She’s more effective when she’s by herself and doesn’t need to worry about us as much. None of us were able to do anything, but she’s making some progress. Let’s not interfere if we can help it.”, explained Angus. Gregg reluctantly accepted his answer and backed down.

By some miracle, Lori was able to impale Eide on her rapier. She grabbed his arm and held it out.
“Bombshell, now!”

Bombshell complied and swung through his hand, catching both rings as they fell. Eide devolved back to his normal state and Lori withdrew her sword from him.

“This wasn’t supposed to happen! You’ll still pay for everything you did to me! There’s still a stockpile of Grist waiting for me at the center of this godforsaken planet.” He disappeared.

“We need to go after him!”, yelled Angus.

“Where did I plug up the hole?!” Bombshell was frantically opening holes in the ground trying to find where it was.

“Can’t we just make a new hole to the center?”, asked Gregg.

“We don’t have time for that! Where is it?!”

Selmers slowed time for everyone besides Bombshell and her. Bombshell thanked Selmers and continued looking for a hole. Eventually, she found one. The two flew down into the hole, and what they saw crushed any remaining hope inside of them. The grist was all gone, and Eide had a colorful aura surrounding him. Bombshell grabbed Selmers and took them outside in an instant.

The sky was now black and the life had drained out of Skaia. Selmers received a message.

GT: We can still fix this.

SF: How? Skaia is dead, the genesis frog is dead, and Eide has the power of Skaia! How can we fix this?

GT: There should be a device on your planet which you need to scratch with one of Echidna’s quills. After that, you need to get everyone out of your medium. Take a meteor from the veil, get everyone on it, and leave. The scratch essentially resets the session, but if you’re in the session when it dies, you will cease to exist. Have Germ guide you through to the new session. Bombshell can be the pilot. Selmers can make sure you get there in a timely manner.

Bs: You mean we have to start over?

GT: Yes, but you should be able to breeze through the game with the help of the new players and your god tier powers. Don’t worry, I’ll be sure to warn the new players of your arrival.

SF: I guess this is all we can do.

Bombshell took Selmers to her planet, gave her the quill, and went to get Germ so he would be ready when they needed to start moving. Selmers’ scratch device was a loom creating the tapestry of their session’s story. She waited there for Bombshell and when she arrived with Germ, unfroze him. They explained everything to Germ and he seemed unusually indifferent to the situation.

GT: Also, I’d suggest you take your planets with you so you can keep everything you’ve built. Grabbing the dream bubble would also be beneficial. It gives everyone a common dream home.

Bombshell told Selmers to start the scratch and went around collecting everyone’s planets, shrinking them down and keeping them floating around her. When she returned to Selmers’ planet, she was just finishing scratching through the giant tapestry.

Selmers then pushed her time powers to the limit, slowing down time as much as possible.
Bombshell was able to grab everyone one-by-one and put them on a meteor along with Selmers and Germ. Germ began to clear a path through the void to the new session, and Bombshell sent them flying at her maximum speed through the furthest ring, grabbing the dream bubble on the way.

Selmers finally released everyone from the time stop, and they were all confused and alert. They slowly came to their senses and began asking questions.

“What happened? Where’s Eide? Where are we?” Mae interrogated Selmers and Bombshell after seeing them leave. Then, behind them, a green ball was seen. I swelled for a moment and then disappeared.

“Here, read the texts.”, said Selmers, tossing the phone to Mae.

“So, we lost?”, Mae pleaded for an answer that wasn’t yes.

“Yes.”, Mae looked devastated, “But, we still have a chance at a second session.”

“That doesn’t answer what happened to Eide. What about him?” Gregg requested.

As if on cue, Eide appeared, ready to destroy them.

“Germ!”, Selmers called out. They activated their fraymotif, trapping Eide like they trapped Jack.

“I guess that answers that.”, Gregg stated.

“I can’t believe we lost.”, Bea lamented, placing a hand on her forehead.

“We haven’t lost yet. We’ll have a set of new players soon. We’ll get stronger, too. We have the rings. We just need to keep going.”, Lori encouraged.

“She’s right. Things are changing. If we can adapt those changes to our favor, we can still win.”, added Angus.

“How long do we have until we reach the new session?”, Mae asked.

“I’d say about a year our time, a day in the new session.”, answered Germ.

“A whole year! What are we supposed to do with a year?!”, Gregg stated.

“We’ll just have to figure it out.”, replied Bea.

“Aww, man. This is gonna be so boring.”

John messaged the group.

GT: If you want to talk about this in more detail, I’d be willing to answer any questions. We could get on voice chat again, and I could introduce you to some more of my friends. There should be laboratories and stuff on the meteor that you can set up base in.

MB: Sounds great. We’ll be there soon.

“I guess it’s time to explore.”, said Mae as she put her phone away. She flew up and began flying across the barren landscape. It didn’t take her long to find one of the aforementioned labs.

“I guess this is it. Welcome to our new home.”, Mae unenthusiastically announced.
“Should we set up our houses around here? We probably won’t need our planets for some time.,” suggested Angus.

“Good idea.,” replied Bombshell, taking the houses off of the planets and placing them on the meteor and next to the lab.

“I’ll go grab my laptop and we can share it once we get inside.,” offered Mae before she entered her house and came out with her laptop.

The group entered the building and saw that the inside was just as gray and dreary as the rest of the meteor. There were science supplies neatly organized all around the many rooms. For now, though, they decided to stay in the main room. After gathering around a table, Angus proposed an idea.

“Wait, before we start the call, I think I might be able to connect this laptop to that monitor over there. It would make it easier for John to see and speak to all of us at once.”

“Go ahead, big guy. Just don’t break my computer, okay?”, Mae remarked playfully.

Angus left and returned with a few different cords. As he had expected, the alien technology wasn’t immediately compatible with their technology, but he had some basic tools with him, and after cutting and rearranging some cords, he got the laptop display to appear on the large monitor on the wall.

Mae called up John and everyone sat on the couch in front of what was probably a tv. John picked up and flipped the audio switch.

“Hey, guys. So, how are you?”, John awkwardly greeted.

“Not exactly great, as you can probably guess.”, replied Bea.

“Yeah, that was a dumb question. Uh, I said I was open to any questions about what happens next, so ask away.”

“Okay, we already know we’re going to a new session, which is a reset of our session. Does that mean we’ll be meeting ourselves?”, asked Angus.

“Probably not. The way the scratch makes sure the new session has the best chance of differing from the old one is swapping you with your parents or whoever was your parental figure at the time. I’m not sure what will happen with multiple parents.”

“So, I’ll either be working with my father… or my mother, is that right?”

“Yeah, I’m sure this has to be hard for you. I know your parents weren’t the best people.”

“I need some time to think.,” Angus said, standing up to leave the room. There was a look of fear and despair on his face.

“Angus, wait.,” Gregg called as he stood up as well, following Angus out of the room.

“I hope I didn’t go too far.,” John worried that he’d said too much, even though he didn’t say much at all.

“You didn’t do anything wrong. Like you said, this is going to be hard for him.,” assured Bea.

“Oh, that’s fine. Is there anything else you’d like to know?”
“What about the cult? What about Eide?”, Mae questioned.

“A number of things could happen in this new universe. The cult may not exist, or it may be larger than ever. One thing is for sure, though. Eide won’t be the one that’s after your dancestors.”

“Dancestors?”

“It’s the term we use to describe our new session’s players because they’re kind of both our parents and our children.”

“Okay, I can see how that would be confusing.”

“Any other questions? I’ll probably be monitoring the new session after this, so I won’t be able to talk to you again until you get there.”

“Aw, I thought we would get to meet your other friends?”

“Sadly, they’re busy right now. I’ll make sure you see them eventually.”

“I guess that’s all we really need to know for now.”

“If that’s the case, I guess I should be leaving. The new session needs to be started before you get there.”

“Good luck with that. I’ll look forward to seeing you when we get there.”

“Me, too. Goodbye.”, John was ready to turn off the computer.

“Bye.”, Mae closed the chat and laid back with a heavy sigh, “I hope Angus is alright.”

Angus walked through a couple of rooms so that he could distance himself from his friends. When he was satisfied, he walked over to a corner, set his arm against the wall, and placed his head on it. He wasn’t sure he was ready to face his parents again, not even after all these years.

Gregg walked in soon after and saw his future husband moping in the corner with his back to him.

“Cap’n? Are you okay?”

“I don’t get it. Why is this hurting me so much?”, Angus kept his back turned, not wanting to show any signs of weakness.

“Why wouldn’t it? Your parents were horrible people. We do have to realize that these people aren’t them. I mean, they will be, but they’ll be different, too. Besides, if you were their parents, I’m sure they didn’t turn out like that.”, Gregg was now next to Angus. He placed a hand on his shoulder.

“What if I was a bad parent? What if I was even worse than them? How am I supposed to look at them like they aren’t the people who tormented my childhood? What if they can’t look at me like that?”, Angus rambled off all of the worst-case scenarios that came to his head.

“Calm down. I’m sure you wouldn’t do that to them. Besides, even if you were like that in this new universe, you can show them that you’re a better person than that, just like we’re going to give them a chance to show that they’re better people than that.”

“I don’t know if I can.”
“You have to. It’s not right to judge these people based on what they were like in our universe. I know it’s hard, but it’s something we need to do. I’ll be there for you the whole way, I promise.”

Angus had turned to face Gregg, and Gregg spread his arms as an offer for an embrace. Angus accepted, separating himself from the corner he had been standing in and pulling in his real corner for a big bear hug.

“Thank you, bug.”

“No problem, cap’n. Now, let’s go back to the rest of the group, okay?”

“Yeah, let’s go.”

The two held hands as they went back into the room with the tv and everyone happily welcomed them back.

“You good, big guy?”, asked Mae.

“Yeah, I’m fine. So, what’s going on? Is John gone already?”

“Well, we just asked about the state of the cult and right now, we don’t know. He said he would be switching his system over to the new universe to make sure they got in okay, so we won’t be seeing him again until we get there.”

“We have a whole year. What are we gonna do?”, pondered Gregg.

“We could have our wedding.”, Angus suggested.

“Do you really want our wedding to be on some big, gray rock?”

“All planets are just rocks. They just have different geography than this one.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right, but what about a ring? What about dress clothes? We don’t have all the stuff we need to have a proper wedding.”

“I guess there’s that. It’ll have to be after we win, then.”, Angus conceded.

“We shouldn’t waste this opportunity. We could train, grind, alchemize cool stuff, and more. We have a whole year. We should spend at least some of it making ourselves stronger. It’s going to take more than adding a bunch of noobs to our roster to take down Eide as he is now.”, said Bombshell.

“She’s right. This is an opportunity to push ourselves beyond our current limits. That’s not to say we shouldn’t take some time to unwind after the last week’s events, but it would be best if we dedicated some time to training and grinding.”, Angus agreed.

“Can that wait until later. I really don’t feel like more fighting right now. Can’t we just go to sleep and forget about this for a couple of hours?”, Mae groaned.

“Yeah, I could sleep.”, replied Bea.

“I guess that’s what we’re doing. We can all go to sleep, have some fun in the dream bubble, and we can figure out what exactly we’re going to start with when we wake up.”, Angus agreed.

Everyone said goodbye to each other and went off to their own beds. Angus let Gregg stay with him since where they all lived wasn’t really of importance anymore.
Mae approached Bea, “Bea?”

“Yes, Mae?”

“Do you think, uh, I could sleep with you tonight? It’s hard to sleep in my house anymore.”

“Uh, sure. I’ll go set up the other mattress and-“

“Actually, could we maybe… share a bed?”, Mae rubbed her arm nervously.

“Why?”

“I don’t know, I just thought that it might be nice. We don’t have to if you don’t want to.”

“No, it’s fine. Just make sure you don’t hog the covers or bed, okay?”

“Oh, yeah! For sure!”, replied Mae giddily.

Bea turned and flew back to her house to hide the blush on her face. She was secretly excited that Mae would be sleeping with her. Maybe Angus was right. Maybe they did have something.

Bea stepped into her house and left the door open for Mae, who followed soon after. Bea’s sprite was there to meet them.

“Why, if it isn’t our favorite duo, MaeBea. I tell you, that pun is so perfect. It’s like, MaeBea, you were meant for each other.”, Bea’s sprite laughed a little too hard at their own joke.

“Yeah, yeah, very funny. We’re going to sleep. Today’s been a long day.”, replied Bea, rolling her eyes.

“Oh, you’re sleeping together now? At this rate, the MaeBea puns will be running rampant by the time we’re in the new session.”

Mae leaned over to whisper into Bea’s ear, “Does this come from your mom or your dad?”

“Definitely mom.”

“Well, I guess I’ll leave you two to your gossip and completely platonic sleepover.”, Bea’s sprite winked at that, “Toodles.”

Bea’s sprite left the room, and Bea led Mae to her room.

“Who says toodles? What even is that?”, Mae remarked.

“Don’t ask me. She’s as much of an enigma to me as anyone else at times. That’s part of why I love her, though.”

“She talked about us like we were a couple or something. You don’t feel that way, right? You’re straight. You had sex with that guy at math camp. I can’t imagine it working between us.”

It started sounding to Bea like she was trying to pre-emptively let herself down. She hadn’t gotten a chance to say anything yet, and Mae was already talking down the possibility of a relationship. Or, maybe she was reading too deep into this.

“Mae, you’re not giving me a chance to speak, and you’re already assuming I don’t have feelings for… Shit.”, Bea realized her mistake too late. Not only did she just unconsciously admit to herself
that she was either homo/bisexual and that she had feelings for Mae, but she had voiced these things aloud in front of her.

“Wait, you actually… I could have… Would you want to start… dating or something?”, Mae eventually decided on.

Bea wasn’t sure what to say, so she decided on the most straightforward answer, “Yes.”

Both of them stood there in silence, Bea’s parents watching on with pride.

“Wanna sleep on this for now?”, asked Mae.

“Yeah, let’s do that.”

The two entered Bea’s room and got settled on her bed. Bea got on the bed first, and Mae entered second. Mae curled up next to Bea and Bea wrapped her arm around her. This would be the start of a long journey for them, not so much for their “dancestors”. They would only need to survive the entry plus a day until a group of top-tier players came to steamroll the game for them. It was probably the least they could do since they were bringing a Skaia-infused eldritch god into their session. Either way, there was still a while to go until they got another shot at a victory. Hopefully, they would be prepared this time, although no one could confidently say that they would be.
Chapter 16

Candy woke with a start. She had just finished having one of her strange dreams. They hadn’t stopped after the cult incident. When her nerves calmed down a bit, Candy looked at the nightstand at her bedside. On it, sat a Bible. She reached her hand out to grab it but felt a wave of sickness hit her body. She still couldn’t read it. It’s been two months, why couldn’t she read it? Of course, cults exist, they just haven’t seen god’s light, so why couldn’t she bring herself to let god’s words touch her again?

Candy stood up and went downstairs to make breakfast. Despite her sudden rejection of god, she still had a job to do. She worked the front desk at the local church. The bills had to be paid somehow, didn’t they?

Sitting down with a bowl of generic, off-brand cereal, Candy opened up her laptop. She had messages from most of her friends. There was one message that was from someone she didn’t recognize. She clicked that first.

GT: Message me back AS SOON as you get up, it’s very important.

CB: Who are you?

GT: That’s not important right now, what’s important is getting you and your friends out before you’re all dead.

CB: What? Why would we die?

Candy immediately wondered if this stranger knew about the cult or if this had anything to do with them.

GT: You don’t have enough time left for me to explain what’s going on. You just need to trust me and download these files.

Attached were two files, both labeled with, “SBURB”.

GT: You also need to send these to anyone who you want to survive. You only have about three and a half hours left, so you need to hurry.

Candy was skeptical of this person who said she would die if she didn’t download these very suspicious files, but she couldn’t shake the feeling that this may have something to do with the black goat or the cult, so she decided, against her better judgment, to download them.

GT: Good. Now we can get started.

CB: Wait. How did you know I downloaded the files?

GT: That’s also gonna have to be saved for later. Your main priority now should be assembling your group that you want to keep alive.

CB: Shouldn’t I send it to everyone, then?

GT: You don’t have time for that, but anyone in the houses of whoever you send these files to will have a chance at survival.
CB: What’s this file supposed to do anyway?

GT: It’s a game called, “SBURB”. It’s complicated to start, so leave it alone for now and go gather up your group. We can create a group chat and I’ll walk you through how to enter the game.

CB: Okay, but one last thing. What’s your name?


Candy wasn’t sure why she was entrusting her life to some stranger on the internet, but she didn’t have time to question it. The first person she decided to message was her best friend, Cayden Delaney, a yellow fox who wore a red, button up shirt, some gray kakhis, a pair of gray sneakers, and a pair of rectangular-lensed glasses. He was the son of Greggory and Angus Delaney.

He also had a sister, Karen, a red bear. Her favorite color was blue, as evidenced by her bright blue shirt and shorts, as well as a pair of blue shoes and a blue bowtie on her head to match. They were both adopted since their parents were gay. Those two were part of the reason Candy had come to accept gay people, despite what most other people, especially christians, had said at the time about them. They proved themselves to be great parents, and their children were leading happy lives. Right now, they both worked at small stores with minimum wage, but they were just saving up for college.

Candy often wondered how her mother, Mae, was doing. She had raised Candy mostly by herself. This was because she was an accident, and the guy she was with abandoned her. When she entered high school, her mother had finally found someone else to be with. She was a girl. To Candy, she was known as Bombshell. Both of them were very fun parents, and lenient, too. They didn’t care what she did unless it put her in serious danger or ruined her future. They were great parents, too.

Shaking her head, Candy knew she had to focus.

CB: Hey, Cayden.

CD: Hello. How are you?

CB: Can you download this game and play it with me?

CD: Sure, what is it?

CB: It’s called SBURB. Some guy messaged me saying the world was ending. We’re supposed to play this to survive.

CD: Are you actually trusting some stranger to tell you that the world is ending and that the only way to survive is to open a mysterious file that they sent you?

CB: I know it sounds dumb, but I just can’t shake the feeling that we need to play this game. I didn’t get a virus from it.

CD: That’s because the virus probably activates along with the program. I wouldn’t trust this guy, Candy.

CB: Can you trust me when I say I have a hunch? Please, I feel like I need to take some serious leaps if I want to gain my faith back.

CD: Fine, but if my computer dies, you’re paying for it, got it?
CB: Yes, that’s fine. I accept full responsibility for the computer.

Candy sent the file and Cayden downloaded it.

CD: How about you open it first? I still don’t trust this.

CB: There are two files. I opened both and nothing bad happened. It says I need to connect to a server and client player.

John entered the chat.

GT: Don’t open the file, Cayden.

CD: Are you the person who sent this file to Candy?

GT: Yes, and I understand that you may have some suspicions, but I only want to help you.

CD: You say you want to save us from the end of the world, but what causes it exactly?

GT: A giant meteor will crash into Earth and destroy it.

CD: How have scientists not spotted this meteor?

GT: I think it may have something to do with portals, but I can’t be sure.

CD: Who do you take me for? Portals? That’s the best you could come up with?

GT: I said I can’t know for sure. Look, you just need to trust that I know these things. I don’t want to invade your privacy if I don’t need to.

CD: There’s nothing you can tell me that can convince me that you just “know these things”. I could wave anything you say aside by saying you’re just a really good hacker.

GT: If I was a hacker, why would I be trying to convince you of anything? I could probably just get what I wanted through hacking you.

CD: You wanting something from me is infinitely more likely than the end of the world by meteor.

CB: Why is it not believable that the world could end? We just killed a cult of people with a leader that could teleport two months ago!

CD: We don’t know that he teleported. It’s more plausible that he found a way to ride the elevator out of our sight.

CB: It was a completely empty box. He couldn’t have been anywhere on or around the elevator, either.

CD: Shut up! Teleportation is not possible!

CB: But what if the black goat exists?

GT: It does exist. In another universe, your “parents” are dealing with it as we speak.

CD: Do you know how ridiculous you both sound?

GT: We don’t have time for this. I have an idea. I can show you that I’m not from your planet and that I’m being serious. Join this video chat. Might as well invite everyone else, too.
Candy and Cayden received an invite to a video chat with ‘EctoBiologist’. They both joined. Karen also joined.

“What are you?”, Cayden’s curiosity was piqued at the appearance of an alien creature on his screen.

“Oh, it’s an alien! That’s so cool! What’s your name?”, Karen’s voice was cheery, filled with child-like wonder at the being on her screen.

“How did you get my sister in here? Do you know her contact info?”

“Isn’t it obvious? He’s using alien technology, duh. You really need to stop being so skeptical of everything. If you don’t stop now, those gray hairs will begin growing by the time you’re thirty.”, Karen pointed at her head, indicating where the gray hairs would begin growing if he didn’t stop worrying so much.

“We can’t just trust anything anyone says, Karen. People lie all the time. I don’t want us being a victim of that again.”

“Oh, come on. That was one time. Not everyone is like that.”

“Yeah, and that one time almost cost us everything!”

Candy winced a bit when they mentioned ‘that time’. It was almost a tragedy. It happened when one day, some bullies were picking on Cayden for having gay parents. It was normal to him, and he had learned to ignore it most of the time. He wouldn’t accept it, however, when one of the bullies pinned him to a wall, punching him in the stomach multiple times. They said it was what he deserved. In an effort to free himself, Cayden pushed the kid back. The kid slipped and fell, breaking his arm.

Cayden had been suspended from school. The bully had lied and said Cayden attacked him, and his accomplices backed his claim. With no other witnesses to the fight, Cayden was forced to face all of the punishment. CPS sprung on the chance to take Gregg and Angus’ children away from them, all under the guise that ‘they obviously weren’t good parents if they couldn’t discipline their child correctly’. They knew that was bullshit. It was because they were gay. They took the case to court, and their lawyer was none other than Beatrice Santello. She was friends with the family, so she gave them a massive discount.

Beatrice, or Bea to her close friends, was one of the best lawyers around. Nowadays, she was retired, but back in her heyday, she was a legend, being able to win many cases that were considered unwinnable. She would allow actual criminals to be found guilty if she could help it. This case was different, though. This wasn’t a battle of cunning and problem-solving, but a battle against human nature. She would be fighting against the deeply rooted prejudices of the people in the jury stand.

The case that followed was seen in completely different lights by Cayden and Karen. Bea had won, either by being lucky enough to have a completely unbiased jury or by somehow convincing people to step back and contemplate their views on homosexuality. Cayden believed that it was only luck that had saved him and his sister in the end, but Karen thought Bea had inspired a change in at least a few people that day. As a result, Cayden became passive and defensive, not willing to trust people unless he had known them well before that day, while Karen became more outgoing, hoping to change the hearts of more people just like Bea had.

“Cay, please. There’s no reason we can’t trust this guy.”
“There’s no reason to trust this guy, either.”

“What if the end of the world is coming? I don’t want you to die just because you couldn’t bring yourself to trust someone with no reason to lie to you.”

Cayden thought this over for a moment.

“Fine. He said not to open the file yet, though. What do I do… whatever your name is?”

“My name is John. For now, wait until we get everyone else who’s going on board. We don’t have a ton of time, so we need to go fast. Who else do you want to bring?”

“Can’t we bring everyone?”, Candy asked.

“No. We can only bring a maximum of twelve people. I’d suggest bringing your closest friends. Bringing people just to save them would probably only result in a failed session.”

“Doesn’t that seem selfish, though?”

“I know it may seem that way, but if you don’t have synergy with your team, you’ll all only end up dead.”

“We need to bring Nick. Luckily, today’s Sunday, so the shop should be closed.”, said Candy.

“What about Darby? She’s a good friend.”, Karen suggested.

“I know he’s a bit young, but Ed and I are good friends, and I want him to survive.”, Candy added.

“Is that all?”, asked John.

Everyone wanted to add other names, but if what John was saying was true, having people they were only acquaintances with on their team would be more harmful than leaving them would be.

“Alright, I’ll invite them to the chat. I hope they pick up.”

Darby, Ed, and Nick all picked up. Nick was a crocodile. He ran the Ol’ Pickaxe in town. His clothes consisted of an olive-colored shirt, blue jeans, and brown boots. Ed, or Edward, was a mouse. He had just entered high school. His usual outfit was a black hoodie handed down from his mother over a plain white tee-shirt, some sweatpants, and black sneakers. Darby was a dark green bird. Often times, she would just throw on whatever she could find, and today was no different. Somehow, her clothes managed to match today with a plain, light gray tee-shirt and jeans. Fashion never seemed as important as everyone seemed to make it out to be to her. She was a junior in high school.

“Hello.”, Nick greeted, waving his hand at the screen.

“How’s the Ol’ Pickaxe running?”, asked Karen.

“Things are tough right now. Profits keep going down. There is good news, though. We’re planning on expanding. We were thinking of hitting up some contacts in Bright Harbor to see if we could build a store there.”

“That’s great! I’m not sure if that’s going to be possible if this alien guy over here is telling us the truth about the end of the world.”

“Oh, that’s just silly. I’m sure everything’s going to be fine. Besides, if the world is ending, there’s
“Actually, that’s why John contacted us. We’re supposed to play this game to survive. It’s called SBURB.”, replied Candy.

“John, is that your name? I never would think that that would be an alien name. Anyways, if we’re playing this game to not die when the world ends, why don’t we just bring everyone?”

“We explained this earlier in the chat. We can only bring twelve people and they need to be compatible with each other, or else the session will fail and there will have been no point to playing in the first place.”, said John.

“Is this like a video game? Will we get to go on adventures?”, Edward asked.

“Yes, adventure is a big part of the game.”

“Awesome! I’ve always wanted to go on an adventure.”

“Do you think this could be because of the black goat? What if it was real?”, wondered Karen.

“It’s not the black goat because the black goat doesn’t exist.”, Cayden answered.

“Look, everyone’s here. The session needs to start now. We need to decide an order of entry. Everyone will be a server and client player to someone else. A server will have control of the client’s house and the house’s surroundings. We need to decide an order that will be best for everyone.”

“I will be Karen’s server player. If what you’re saying actually turns out to be true, I don’t want anyone else having control of her house.”, stated Cayden.

“Can I be your server, Cayden?”, asked Candy.

“Sure. That actually makes me happy. Despite your willingness to accept this guy’s claims without question, I still trust you.”

“I’ll be Candy’s server, I guess.”, said Edward.

“That leaves Nick and Darby. Someone either has to be Ed’s server or Karen’s client. The last person will be slotted in the last open spot.”, John explained.

“I’ll be Karen’s client.”, offered Nick.

“Oh, that’s interesting. It creates a loop. Is there a reason for that?”, wondered Cayden.

“It’ll all be clear once you enter the game. Darby, are you okay with being Nick’s client and Ed’s server?”

“Yeah, that’s fine.”, she replied.

“Okay then. Everyone should get set up with each other and I’ll explain how to enter. If any of you have other people in your house, they need to know about this so they can defend themselves. There is an alternative but you’ll understand what that is once I start explaining everything to you.”

John helped everyone through the process of setting up the alchemy equipment and prototyping the kernelsprites. Everything was going fine until Karen got a knock at her door. She opened the door, and a cloaked figure barged in.
“What the hell!?” Karen yelled as this mysterious person pushed past her, knocking her down.

“Who are you?”, she demanded.

“Don’t you recognize me? No?”, he teleported, “How about now?”

“Eine! But we killed you!”, Karen backed away slowly, terrified.

“You thought you did. Sadly for you, the black goat’s powers aren’t so weak.”

“What do you want?”

“I want in on your game, and that’s what I’m here to guarantee.”, he teleported into the kernelsprite.

“Are you serious? Again?”, John groaned.

“Karen, are you okay!? What happened?”, Cayden asked.

“I’m fine. What did you mean by ‘again’?”

“Eide, or Eine in this case, did the same thing in the session I just came from. It’s bad enough having one of them running around ruining everything. Why did it have to happen again?”

“You said the enemies get his powers, right? He just teleported! I can’t believe he wasn’t lying or just crazy or something.”, Cayden was sweating bullets. The reality of the situation hit him. John could actually be telling the truth about everything.

“Wait, you said this happened in your last session. Why aren’t you still with them?”, Karen asked nervously.

“Their session was killed by Eide, their version of Eine. They’re actually on their way to this session right now. They’ll be able to help you win your game.”

“Didn’t you say something about our parents dealing with the black goat? Does that mean they’re the players of the other session?”, questioned Candy.

“Yes. You will meet your parents in the game, but they aren’t the same people. To them, you’re technically their parents.”

“That’s so cool! I can’t wait to meet them! Are either of my dads there?”, Karen was excited by the prospect of playing a game like this with her sort of parents.

“Yes, they are both there. I wouldn’t expect the best reception, though.”

“Why not?”

“Well, in that universe, you were… extremely abusive to Angus. They know you’re a different person, but the scars are still there.”

Karen became extremely sullen, as if on the verge of tears, “Why would I do that to him?”

“I can’t say for sure, but you’re not the same person as them. I can tell just by what little I’ve seen of you that you’re not like that.”

“What about me? If she was Angus’ mother, I was probably Gregg’s father, correct?”, Cayden
inquired.

“Yes. You weren’t abusive, but you did give Gregg to his uncle for a year just because you were sick of him.”

Cayden’s expression darkened, but he said nothing.

Karen suddenly became filled with resolve, “I’m going to make it up to them! I’ll show them that I can still be a good person!”

“Me, too.”, added Cayden.

“What about me?”, asked Nick.

John was getting tired of telling these people about their failings as parents in another universe, “You were Bea’s father. You were a good father until your wife died. You suffered a mental breakdown over many years and eventually pushed all responsibility for the Ol’ Pickaxe onto Bea, crushing her hopes and dreams of going to college. Now, we really need to get started. You can save any questions about your alternate selves for your dancestors, which is the term we use to describe what these other players are in relation to you.”

“Fine.”, said Nick, “Let’s get started.”

John led them through the rest of the process. Everyone still had to prototype their sprites. Darby threw in a stick she found on the ground. Cayden threw in a tissue. Nick took one of his dozens of hammers and threw it in.

Candy saw this as an opportunity to regain her faith. All she had to do was throw the bible in, and she would have the word of god to guide her. She mustered up the strength to pick up the book and threw it in. To her dismay, the image at the center of the sprite showing what it would turn into once they entered the game was only a book. The word of god had no power. It was all a lie. Candy wasn’t sure what to do. She had no one to turn to anymore. No, that was wrong. She still had her friends. Now was her chance to put faith into those that were actually there for her.

Ed took the kernelsprite downstairs to her mother, Lori. His dad had died in a car accident a few years ago, so he wasn’t there. It was just Edward and his mother. He wanted to make sure she stayed alive in the game, so he approached her and, without her permission, pushed her into the sprite. He felt bad for not asking first, but he knew it was what had to be done to avoid unnecessary casualties.

Once everyone’s kernelsprites were prototyped, they had to decide an order of entry. They chose Darby as the first to enter. From what John had said, his would be the easiest. He and Edward were the youngest, so they should get the easiest path to entry.

Another thing that had to be decided on was a weapon type to use. Nick chose a sledgehammer as his weapon. It was his largest hammer and it would do the most damage. He thanked the fact that he owned so many hammers because it gave him a wide variety of weapons to choose from.

Karen wanted to have something unique as her weapon. She wanted something no one else would think to use. That’s when she remembered her yo-yo. She had heard somewhere that they were originally made to be weapons. She always liked to carry one in case she got bored, and she had pretty much mastered it.

Cayden owned a handgun for concealed carry along with a few extra magazines. He wanted to be able to protect himself and his friends if the need ever arose. Even though it wasn’t likely, it was
certainly a possibility, especially after the cult incident last fall.

Darby loved messing with explosives with her father. He was a demolitionist and was always able to sneak out a few extra sticks of dynamite for them to play with. He still had a secret stash in the basement of all of the ones they never got around to blowing up. Darby decided those would be a good weapon.

Edward never shared his mother’s love for horror movies, but he did love action/adventure movies, especially ones involving martial arts. He wanted to be like the people in the movies, so his mother had graciously signed him up for martial arts classes at the age of ten. He figured he could survive with those skills alone.

Candy decided on an old tennis racket. When she was young, her mother had encouraged her to join a sport. She decided on tennis because she liked the feeling of winning by her merits alone, and even in doubles, it was more satisfying to win on a smaller team than on a larger one where people would be less likely to notice your skill in the masses of people playing at one time.

Now that everyone had their weapons, it was time to enter the medium. They only had fifteen minutes left before everything was destroyed. Darby alchemized her cruxite artifact. Hers was a stick of dynamite. It was easy enough to figure out what to do. She struck a match and set off the dynamite. When the fuse reached its end, the house teleported into the medium.

Edward received a set of puzzle pieces. Edward enjoyed puzzles, and this one even had the added challenge of all of the pieces being the same color. There were only nine, though, so it didn’t take him long to solve it, which disappointed him a bit. When the final piece was in place, he was sent to the medium.

Candy was next. She got an apple. On the surface, it would seem to be a simple task. Just eat the apple. For Candy, however, this meant more than eating an apple. It meant giving up her old life and forming new beliefs based on everything that had been presented to her. She ate the apple, knowing there was no other way to move forward.

Cayden was given a pill. He knew he only had to swallow the pill, but everything in his mind told him not to. Any number of things could be wrong with this pill. What if it was poisoned? Maybe John just set all of this up just to kill them. He shook his head. That was unreasonable. Why would John want them dead? Karen was right. He needed to start trusting people. With reluctance, he swallowed the pill and found himself in the medium.

Karen was given an old-fashioned kitchen timer. It had fifteen minutes left before it reached zero. She wanted so badly to force it to zero, but something told her this was a test of her wits and patience. The timer would reach zero right before the meteor struck.

While Karen waited, Nick was busy building something with a set of boards, a hammer, and nails he was given using a strange schematic. The meteor was now visible in the sky. No one saw where it came from, but it told Nick that he needed to hurry. He could feel the heat of the meteor nearing his house as he hammered the final board into place. The end result was the image of a house made out of six squares, one larger than the others. What this symbol meant, he wasn’t sure, but he was happy to have made it into the game.

Karen watched as the giant meteor barely touched the roof of her house. The timer went off, and suddenly, the searing heat disappeared. She was in the medium. Everyone had made it into the medium safely. There was still the matter of the initial wave of imps that would invade every house, though. Everyone readied their weapons for the onslaught. Doors were broken and windows were smashed. A strife had begun.
It had been about two months since their journey had started. Mae and the others had spent the time grinding and bonding for the most part. Mae and Bea spent a large portion of their time together, fighting together, growing together, laughing together, and only occasionally crying together. They had an outlet for their deeply buried feelings in each other. Their relationship was going smoothly and everyone else noticed a subtle change in their moods. Bea became less cynical and Mae slowly grew less self-deprecating.

Gregg and Angus grew closer as well. Without needing to worry about money and their budget every day, they were able to focus almost entirely on each other when they were alone. They couldn’t wait to get married when this was all over.

Love was in the air for those four, but there were still things that needed to be done. For one, it would be beneficial to create a new genesis frog. It would take a while, and Bombshell cursed herself for not keeping copies of the slimes used to make the original, but they had a whole year, so it didn’t matter too much.

Lori continued training with her mother but found that she had surpassed her by quite a margin. She had no choice but to grind monsters for experience. Germ spent a lot of his time playing video games. All of the houses still had power somehow. He also visited his family, who were still holding up just fine in the house. Germ had set up great defense systems, so they didn’t need to worry about getting killed unless Eide decided to show up there. They often worried about him, but he assured them that he would be fine. They would watch movies to pass time for the most part, and with a year of waiting to do, Germ often joined them.

Overall, life wasn’t horrible, but they all wanted more. The new universe had been so close, but now they had to wait a whole year to try again. One day, Angus decided to call everyone together for a meeting. Everyone gathered in the tv room, as there wasn’t a dedicated meeting room yet.

Once everyone had gathered, Angus spoke, “I think that it’s been long enough for us to start thinking of a plan for what we’ll do once we arrive in the new session.”

“Did you have something in mind?”, asked Bea.

“I’ve been thinking about it, but I figured we should decide what to do as a team. I’ve laid out multiple problems we may have to deal with in the new session. The first one concerns the possibility of a second Eide.”

“I doubt he’ll be able to get both rings in a day, and I know the new players won’t have their session completed by the time we’re there. Can’t we just kill him early on? We’re all god tier. It shouldn’t be hard.”, Mae suggested.

“That was probably the weakest part of our original plan in the old session. If our Eide is a sprite, the other may be as well, and sprites are immortal. The only way we could win is by separating Eide from the sprite.”, Angus explained.

Everyone contemplated this problem for a few moments until Lori spoke up, “John said something about the sprite exploding if there were two people in the sprite that were incompatible, right? What if I could get the same thing to happen by overloading him with my heart powers?”

“That might work, but how much would it take? Eide’s working with infinite power from Skaia. Yes, pages have the most potential out of any class, but is it enough to stop a god?”

“It’s worth a shot. If anyone can do it, it’s this kid, here.”, said Gregg as he gave Lori a playful pat on the back.
“Besides, we’re god tier. The tier can’t make that much of a difference, can it?”, added Bea.

“I guess it’s our best shot for now. The next thing I wanted to address was the appearance of new rings in this session. What exactly is our plan for that?” Angus brought up a good point. There would be four rings in play now and possibly two Eides chasing after them.

“We could easily kill the queens and steal the rings if we need to.”, stated Mae, making a swing at the air with her bat.

“What if we don’t make it in time to prevent their Eide from stealing the rings?”, asked Selmers.

“We’ll just steal them back. Lori can just stab their Eide, and Bombshell can cut the rings off, just like we did two months ago.”, suggested Gregg.

“That can work. What about Jack? He’ll be in their session, too.”, Angus reminded.

Mae twirled her bat around, “If he tries anything, I’ll smash his skull in myself.” Her bat made a whooshing noise as she snapped it down.

“What should we do with our rings? I don’t think we should keep them. It’s not like we could use them anyways.”, Bombshell held out both of the rings they had stolen from Eide.

“They could be useful as a bargaining chip, though. Or, we could attempt to set Jack up against Eide again. Their Eide, not ours.”, said Angus. He paced around a bit and scratched his chin. “Just keep them in your captchalogue for now. No one can get to it there.”

“Got it.”, Bombshell placed the rings in her inventory and that was that.

Angus stopped pacing and turned to face everyone, “Okay, now that we’ve got most of the problem points out of the way, we should discuss what exactly we’re going to do once we get there. What’s our game plan?”

“First, we should probably introduce ourselves to our dancestors before we start messing with their session.”, recommended Bea.

“Probably a good idea. Chances are, they’ll still be learning the ropes of SBURB and it would probably scare them if we just started flying around and doing stuff without their permission.”

“After we have our meet and greet, we could start with stealing both rings if they haven’t been stolen already.”, Gregg made a swiping motion with his hand, “And if they have been stolen, we’ll steal them back.”

“After that, we should probably help our dancestors through their gates and to god tier as fast as possible. Our Eide could come back at any time, and we need to be ready.”, Mae added.

“The rest we could probably figure out as we go along. We still don’t know enough about their session to take it much further than that. I just wanted to make sure we were all on the same page.”, said Angus, “I guess this means the meeting is adjourned.”

With that, everyone left to go do their own things, whether it be grinding, bonding, or just relaxing. They still had a good ten months left until they reached the new session. Hopefully, everyone in the new session would survive long enough for them to get there without irreparably damaging the game. With John there, no one felt a need to worry about that. He was a good guide, so they would probably be fine. All they had to do was survive one day. That shouldn’t be a problem, right?
Candy gripped her tennis racket tightly as she heard the sound of broken glass. She mouthed a prayer to herself before remembering that she was praying to nothing. The bible was just a book. There was nothing special about it. Who could she pray to?

That question went unanswered as imps swarmed into the kitchen, where Candy was. She swung just like she would do in tennis, except harder. She didn’t care if she sent these imps flying out of bounds.

Her swinging arm was still a little rusty. After all, she hadn’t played tennis since high school. Despite this, she still managed to hold her own against the stream of black that funneled into the kitchen.

At one point, the imps had reached her and began to swipe their tiny claws at her. In response to this, Candy mustered up the adrenaline to tear one of her cupboard doors off of the hinges. She used it as a shield, pushing imps off of her with it.

Soon after this, the imps had seen that they would lose and scurried out of the house. Candy breathed a sigh of relief and got back to her computer, where John was waiting.

“Hey, Candy. Good to see you’re fine. I see you got a shield.”, John pointed at the screen to where the cupboard door was to him.

“Yeah, it helped. How’s everyone else?”

“Cayden’s doing good. He got them all to start chasing him around and he’s been shooting at them. He’s a good shot. He keeps getting headshots. Darby just blew them all up. Like mother, like son, I guess? Or is it like father, like daughter? Nevermind. Nick’s doing fine and so is Ed. Karen’s having some trouble. Turns out, plastic yo-yos aren’t great for killing monsters.”

“Is there any way I can help her?”

“If you could build a jetpack, you might be able to fly there before the fight’s over. I think she’ll be fine, though. She may have some cuts and bruises afterwards, but she won’t die.”

Karen wasn’t going to die. Despite choosing a plastic toy as her weapon, she was determined to fight through. It simply wouldn’t do to die this early. Karen tried multiple times to perform a sweeping attack with the yo-yo, but it would only ever bounce off the first one after killing it.

One by one, the imps fell. This was until Karen was backed into a corner. There were only three imps left, but she couldn’t properly swing her yo-yo in such close quarters. Karen was forced to bash the remaining imps’ heads in with the yo-yo, but she received a few claw marks in the process.

“I need a better yo-yo. Maybe I should get two. Dual wield yo-yos. Yes, that is exactly what I am going to do.” Karen went to look for things to alchemize into her yo-yo. Everyone else had no problems dealing with their imps, mostly because they weren’t using toys as weapons.

“That first fight will never get any less stressful for me to watch.”, said John. Cayden was still taking everything in.

“I can’t believe this is happening. Everyone’s actually dead?”
“I told you that’s what happened. You just didn’t believe me. It’s not exactly something you hear about every day.”

“What do we do now?”, asked Nick.

“Depending on how everyone’s feeling, you can either go to sleep, or you can attempt your first gate. A gate usually takes a few hours to complete, so keep that in mind.”

“Wait, before that, what happened to Eine?”, questioned Edward.

“Oh shit. Karen?! Are you there?”, Cayden got close to the screen to see if he could see his sister. She came back sporting two new yo-yos and some gloves. The yo-yos had a razor-sharp blade on both disks. The gloves were obviously to protect her hands from that.

Karen was messing with the yo-yo when she returned. She needed to get used to the new weight of the yo-yo. “I’m here. Check out these new yo-yos!”

“Are you sure those are safe? What if one accidentally hits you? Are those claw marks??”

“I’ll be fine. I’ve been playing with yo-yos since I was six. This’ll be good, trust me. Also, I feel fine. These are just flesh wounds.”, Karen threw the new toys down and flung it back up a few times, causing Cayden to flinch each time.

“Fine. Just promise me you won’t accidently kill yourself with those.”

“Yes, I promise. Can we go explore or something?”

“First, where’s Eine?”, asked Cayden.

“He left right after we entered. I have no Idea where he is now.”

“This could be bad.”, worried John.

“Why? What can he do?”, questioned Cayden.

“In the old session, the same guy you’re dealing with became a sprite and he went to retrieve these very powerful rings from the white and black queens. He became unstoppable for a while.”

“What’s this about queens?”, asked Candy.

John explained Prospit and Derse, as well as the societal structure of them both. He also brought up the war between them and why they needed to stop it.

“This game seems really complicated. We have to deal with politics now? And a war between two planets?”

“We could probably manipulate the politics to work in our favor. I’ll have to see the political structures for myself, though.”, Cayden could be heard tapping his desk. It was both a nervous habit and something he did when deep in thought. In this case, it was both.

“That’s if Eide- I mean Eine doesn’t kill the queens first.”, John had to correct himself, as he was still used to saying Eide. “Chances are, he’s on his way now.”

“We should go to sleep then, right? We can intercept him at either planet if we do that.”, offered Karen.
“I don’t think that would be advisable. The Derse dreamers are in no position to wander around that place freely. You don’t even know how to use your powers, yet.”, argued John.

“We get powers!? What are they? I want to know!”, Karen was excited.

“Give me a second, I can check.”, John messed around with the trollian program used to connect to other universes but was finding the future of this timeline to be glitching out. He couldn’t see a thing.


“What’s wrong?”, a voice came from another room. It was Kanaya.

“Hey, Kanaya. I can’t see the timeline past this point. Do you know what’s wrong?”

“I can’t say I do. This is all still new to me. I really wish Sollux was here. He’s the one who created trollian in the first place.”

“What did you do, John?”, this voice was louder and more angry sounding.

“I didn’t do anything, Karkat. It just won’t work.”

“And what made you think I could help with that? Technology was Sollux’s job, but wait, he’s still dead!”

John leaned back in his chair a bit, “Okay, geeze, I’m sorry if I brought up any bad memories.”

“Your apology has been begrudgingly accepted on account of the fact that we are ‘friends’. Sadly, there’s still nothing I can do about this. Kanaya’s the one that’s been studying this stuff. She’s your best bet, and by the looks of it, she doesn’t have a goddamn clue what’s going on. You’ll just have to deal with it. Now, I have some grubs to care for.”

“It still surprises me that you’re taking care of children. I never would have expected that from you.”

Karkat snapped back around, “What are you trying to say, John?”

“It’s just that you never really seemed like a father figure to me.”

Karkat grabbed John and held him by his collar, “Don’t you dare doubt my parental skills! I am a great caretaker, thank you very much.”

“Okay, okay, I’m sorry!”

“You’re really testing the limits of my forgiveness, John. Us being ‘friends’ doesn’t mean you just get to insult me like that.”

“I wasn’t trying to insult you. In fact, I was trying to give you a compliment.”

“Well, be more clear about that next time.”, Karkat threw John back into the chair, “Luckily for you, I am a merciful guy, so you are once again forgiven. Now, I really have to go. It’s past feeding time.”

After Karkat left, John gave a long sigh, “He really takes being a parent seriously, huh?”

“Yeah, I think it’s been helping him get over not being able to keep everyone alive. It’s not his
fault, but he thinks it is.”, Kanaya speculated.

“He didn’t need to be violent about it. I guess this problem isn’t going to be fixed.”

“Sadly, I don’t have any clue what’s wrong. It probably has something to do with the scratch, but that’s only speculation. Sorry I couldn’t help.”

“It’s fine. It just sucks that I won’t be able to tell these people their powers.”

“It’s always more fun to discover these things by yourself anyways. Well, I should also be going. Good luck, John, and good luck to you, too.”, she said looking at the new players. Kanaya then left, leaving John and the group.

“Well, I guess you’ll have to discover your powers yourselves. It sucks, but I guess that’s how the game wants to be played.”

“What kind of powers are out there?”, asked Karen.

“We call every set of powers classpects. There are 12 classes and aspects, making 144 different possible combinations. Your aspect determines what you have power over, and your class determines how those powers are used. For example, Karen, your dancestor, Angus, is a mage of mind, mage being the class and mind being the aspect. Mages understand their aspect, so he understands the mind. This gives him immense amounts of knowledge because he knows how the mind works, so he can know almost anything through logic, including how his and everyone’s actions will impact the future. You can see how that’d be awesome to have.”

“I was thinking more magic powers, not just being really smart.”, replied Karen.

“Those exist, too, but in the end, all aspects have both a literal and figurative meaning. Angus can read minds, but mind is about knowledge, so he has lots of that. His boyfriend, or husband now, is a rogue of breath. He has wind powers, but in order to use them, he has to steal it first. I’m a breath player, so I know a lot about it. Breath is all about freedom and self-direction. When a breath player comes into their own, no one can tell them what to do.”

“I hope I get something cool.”

“You’ll figure it out later. Right now, we need to decide what to do next. Like I said before, you could try to finish the first gate, or you could go to sleep and continue when you wake up.”

“I could use some sleep. I just hope I don’t wake up on Derse.”, said Cayden.

“I see a whole new world out there. I need to explore it!”, Edward insisted.

“Shouldn’t we stay close to our houses for now? At least until we get some better gear.”, recommended Nick.

“I could go for some early game grinding.”, Darby agreed.

Karen groaned, “Grinding? That’s so lame. I want to go fight big bosses and stuff. These yo-yos would be wasted if I just killed imps with them.”

“It sucks, but it would probably be best if we didn’t dive headfirst into this. Let’s spend the day grinding. When will our dancestors be here, again?”, asked Candy.

“They should be here tomorrow.”
“Great! With their help, we’ll win for sure.”

“Ugh, fine. We’ll grind for today, but tomorrow, I am going to explore this planet and unlock all of its secrets.”, Ed conceded.

“Alright, sounds like a plan. I’ll check in with you again later. I’ve got some things I need to do.”, said John.

“Bye. Thanks for all your help.”, replied Candy.

John waved goodbye and turned off his computer, leaving the new players to grind the rest of the day.

The journey was now halfway done. There were only six months to go. Love was still in the air as Mae and Bea’s relationship blossomed as well as Gregg and Angus’. Selmers and Bombshell also grew closer, though just as friends. A year gave everyone a chance to grow closer together. Mae and Gregg did what “crimes” they could in the dream bubbles, sometimes being joined by Bea, Angus, Germ, or even Lori. Selmers felt “crimes” weren’t really her thing and neither did Bombshell. Bea and Angus shared some heartfelt discussions pertaining to the events of the past six months. Bombshell had created a new genesis frog with the help of Selmers.

After six months, though, everyone began to get a bit antsy. The journey was already halfway done. They had to admit, not having to worry about Eide or SBURB for a while was nice, but they knew it would be over soon, and they’d have to face the problem that Eide presented as well as anything that may have gone wrong in the new session. They had a bit of a plan, but it certainly had holes.

Despite this, they still enjoyed their free time together. Mae was certainly happier than she had been previously, and most of it was due to Bea. Bea gave her the first sign that, just maybe, she wasn’t completely worthless. Bea was also helping Mae with the loss of her parents.

Gregg’s self-esteem was going up as well. Now, instead of his fear of not being good keeping him up at night, it was his joy over someone believing he was good enough to pledge their love to.

One night, Mae and Bea were laying together when Mae began crying. This seemingly came out of nowhere. Nothing had happened recently that would have made her upset, and it wasn’t a regular occurrence.

“What wrong, Maeday?”, Bea asked.

Mae’s voice was shaky, and she struggled to keep back the sobs, “I don’t know. I just started thinking about my parents, and how I want things to go back to the way they were, and that I miss coming home to dad watching Garbo and Malloy, and how I miss mom’s cooking and our talks in the morning, and I just realized how much I miss all of that.”

“Has this been going on for long?”, Bea asked.

“Yeah, sort of? It just became overwhelming all of a sudden. I thought I was okay. I don’t understand.”

Bea wrapped an arm around Mae and pulled her close, “I know it hurts, Mae, and it’s okay to cry about it. The worst thing you could do is hold it in. I know what that’s like, and you don’t want it. I should’ve tried to talk to you about it more.”

“I just want them back. I want everyone back. We keep telling ourselves they would have died
anyways, but I wish it didn’t have to be that way. Why couldn’t we have saved more people?”

“Mae, you saw what happened with Angus’ apartment. All of those people still died, even though
they came in with us. The only reason we were able to make it this far is because we were able to
work with each other. It takes a lot of coordination to pull off some of the stuff we did. Bringing in
people we don’t know could’ve be bad for both them and us.”

“It’s all because of this damn game! Why does SBURB even exist? Who would want this?”

“I don’t know, but we’re here now, and we need to keep moving forward. We only exist for each
other now, so let’s make the most of it.”

“I’m scared, Bea. For the first time since college, I feel like I’m worth a damn, and already, life is
threatening to take everything away again. Eide’s going to kill us, and we’ll lose everything!”, Mae
was physically shaking now.

Bea sighed, “Mae, I can’t promise we’ll survive, but I’m sure as hell not going down without a
fight, and neither are you or anyone else. We’ll make sure Eide has to go through hell to kill us,
right?”

“But, what if it doesn’t work?”

“Then we die. It’s either him or us. All we can do is try to make sure we come out on top.”

“I don’t want to die.”

“If you don’t want to die, fight for it.”

“Yeah. Yeah, I will. I guess I shouldn’t be worrying about it yet. We still have six months. Let’s
just go to sleep, okay. We can talk more about it tomorrow.”

“Okay.”

After some grinding, Candy and her friends had everything they needed to build some decent gear.
Candy combined her tennis racket with a knife and got the tennis axe. It was just a tennis racket
with blades around it. She combined her cupboard shield with a fantasy book she had, and it
became an actual shield. It was nothing special, but it was certainly better than a door.

Cayden did some experimenting, and was able to create a pistol that runs on a battery magazine. It
shot small, electrical projectiles, and it held much more ammo in one magazine. He created a few
extra magazines just in case.

John messaged Nick and sent him a code, saying only that it would be amazing. When Nick created
the item, it was a pogohammer, a hammer combined with a pogo ride. John explained how to use it
properly, to which Nick expressed concern for how practical this thing actually was. John
promised him it could do massive damage to early-game bosses if charged properly. Nick gave in
and decided to give it a shot.

Karen was content with the yo-yo she had, and decided to make some other cool stuff. She made a
jetpack, which amazed her, and some armor. It weighed her down, but with her flinging yo-yos
with blades on them around, she figured she’d play it safe.

Ed crafted a pair of rocket gloves and a pair of rocket shoes. They weren’t great for distance flying,
but they would make his blows stronger. A fist was one thing, but a fist propelled by a rocket was
in its own league.
Darby crafted more bombs of various types. If there was one thing she would be, it would be versatile. Fire bombs, frost bombs, gas bombs, normal bombs, she had it all.

Another goal everyone tried to reach was obtaining their powers, but no one knew how they worked, outside of the fact that they had them. John wasn’t clear about how one would go about using their powers.

It was about time for everyone to go to sleep. Today was a long day, and everyone needed some rest. They were all out like lights moments after hitting their beds.

Candy fell asleep, but immediately woke up. She was in a room covered in bright yellow. Her clothes were yellow, as well. She was on Prospit. This relieved her of the stress she had been having over possibly waking up on Derse.

Candy decided it would be best to meet up with everyone and meet the white queen. They might be able to convince her to give them the ring so that it would not fall into Eine’s hands.

Candy remembered John telling everyone they could fly while asleep, so she took off out her window and searched for whoever else was on Prospit. The people below her pointed and waved, seemingly excited for her awakening. Soon enough, Candy spotted Nick flying around just like her.

“Hey, Nick!”, called Candy as she flew toward him.

Nick waved back and flew to meet her halfway, “You got Prospit, too, huh?”

“Yes, and I’m glad. I don’t think I could deal with people trying to kill me all the time.”

“Same here. So, what are we going to do?”

“I wanted to meet up with our third person and find the white queen. I want to see if we can get her ring. Is that alright with you?”

“Yeah, whatever you want. You probably have better judgement than me in this situation. All I’m really good at is building stuff and running a store. I’m no good at politics or negotiation.”, Nick laughed a bit self-deprecatingly.

“Isn’t part of running a business negotiation?”

“Well, yeah, but it’s not the same.”

“If you say so.”

“Candy, Nick, is that you?”, came a voice from below the two.

“Karen! Hi!”, Candy called back.

Karen flew up to the two, “Prospit dreamers for the win!” she pumped a fist in the air.

“Okay, everyone’s here. We should go visit the white queen and ask for the ring.”, Candy urged.

“What if she says no?”, asked Nick.

“Then we’ll take it by force.”, Karen replied as she cracked her knuckles.

“Can we not. Those rings are powerful. We’d just get ourselves killed. We’ll just explained that an eldritch god is trying to assassinate her, and hopefully, we’ll be fine.”, argued Candy.
“We’ll just have to go see, won’t we? Come on.”, ushered Karen.

The three followed Karen through the sky looking for the royal palace where the queen resided. The front was oddly vacant. One would expect there to be guards at the front gate, yet there were none.

“I have a bad feeling about this.”, said Nick worriedly.

“I’m sure it’s nothing. Let’s go inside.”, replied Candy.

As the three made their way inside, yells could be heard down the hall. Everyone picked up their pace. Something was definitely wrong. When they reached the door to the throne room, it burst open. Eine flew out, being chased by the queen. He seemed injured. When he saw Candy and the others, however, he grinned. He was in front of Candy in an instant. Candy felt a hand grip tightly around her neck as she was pulled into the air.

“Hey, what are you doing?! Let go of her!”, Karen yelled as she jumped at Eine. Eine moved out of the way and grabbed her, throwing her to the side. Nick trembled in fear. There was nothing he could do.

Turning to the white queen, his voice boomed, “Ha! I have the upper hand now! Give me the ring, or your precious heroes die!”

The queen walked toward Eine, the intention to kill not leaving her.

“Wait! No, please! Give him the ring! You can’t let Candy die!”, pleaded Nick.

“What are you doing?”, Candy managed to get out.

“We don’t have a choice. We can deal with him later. I’m not letting you die!”

The white queen hesitated for a moment.

“You should listen to the croc. If you take a step closer, I won’t hesitate to kill the girl and her friends.”

“No, please. Don’t listen to him. I’ll be fine.”, Candy pleaded.

The queen had fallen out of a fighting state. She stared at her hand for a moment before taking the ring off of her finger. Everyone stared at her, terrified, except for Eine, who smiled greedily.

Candy was immediately dropped, and Eine teleported and snatched the ring, resulting in it fusing with him. The ring was now irremovable from his finger.

“No! Why would you do that?! We could have done something!”, Candy scolded.

“I’m sorry, he was going to kill you!”, argued Nick.

“He can kill us even easier now!”

“She’s right, you know.”, Eine already had a blade up to the queen’s throat.

“Let her go! You promised!”, demanded Nick.

“You’re an idiot. You can’t stop me now. You probably couldn’t stop me before.”, Eine slit the queen’s throat, leaving her bleeding helplessly on the ground.
No one said a word, only staring unbelievingly at what was happening to them. Eine teleported to Candy, swinging his spectral sword. Candy put an arm out as some attempt at protection.

“NO!”, screamed both Karen and Nick. Then, there was a bright light. Something had stopped the sword from hitting Candy. When Candy looked up, she saw a shield of light in front of her.

“What? Of course, you’re a hope player, but this early? You’re probably a knight, then. No matter, it won’t save you.”, Eine thrust the sword through the shield, shattering its currently fragile form. Candy stumbled back. Eine rushed her again, and she put up another shield. This one broke just as easily.

“You can’t win. Just give up. If you do, I’ll make it qui- “, Eine stopped suddenly.

Don’t kill them yet.

“Are you sure?”

Yes, leave them for now. That is my command.

“Fine.”, Eine gave one last, hateful glare to Candy and teleported away.

Now that Eine was gone, Candy and the others became aware of the scene that was unfolding with the queen’s now lifeless corpse. She had been covered with a sheet and was being carried away by some guards.

“Damn it!”, growled Candy.

“I’m so sorry! I didn’t think that would happen!”

“Well, it did, and now, Eine has the ring, and the queen is dead!”

“I’m sure we can fix this, and if we can’t, our dancestors certainly can.”, assured Karen.

“Yes, I’m sure they can, but they’re also bringing a more powerful Eine with them. We can’t let there be two of them.”

“What do you expect us to do? We’ve only just started. Even though you suddenly got your powers, it didn’t do shit.”, argued Nick.

“That was really cool, by the way.”, added Karen.

Nick continued, disregarding what Karen said, “They’ll be here tomorrow. I’m sure this’ll be nothing to them. Then, we can help them deal with their Eine in any way we can.”

“What if he gets the second ring?”, worried Candy.

“There’s nothing we can do about that. Let’s just hope the others can deal with it if it does happen.”

“Hope. I guess that’s my aspect, huh? A knight of hope, that’s what he said, right? What does that mean? I certainly don’t feel hopeful right now.”

“We can ask John once we wake up. We should probably help these people with their loss while we’re here.”

“Yeah, we can’t let things fall into anarchy here. I guess my first act as a knight of hope will be to
try and give these people some.”

Cayden woke up in a purple room. Of course, he would get Derse. Life really hated him, didn’t it? With a sigh, Cayden got out of bed and looked out his window. His room was on top of a tall tower. There were people below on the streets.

Making sure not to cause any commotion, Cayden flew silently down to ground level into an alleyway. He knew he had to make it to the royal palace. They couldn’t let Eine get the ring. Cayden worked his way quickly and stealthily through the back alleys of Derse. He had seen the general direction to the palace from his window.

Cayden suddenly got the feeling that something was wrong, and he quickened his pace. He wasn’t sure where this feeling came from, but he just knew he didn’t have long before something bad happened. As the palace came into view, he saw why.

Eine was out front, and Edward and Darby were in his way. Ed was saying something that was inaudible to Cayden. There were two dead guards on either side of them. The sound of many footsteps came from inside the palace. Four more guards came bursting out the front doors.

A ball of black magic formed in Eine’s hand and Ed tackled Darby to the side. Eine fired the ball into the center of the four guards, causing an explosion that sent them flying in all directions. They did not get back up. Ed and Darby Felt a few small pieces of shrapnel graze them slightly.

Cayden wasn’t sure what to do. Eine had one of the rings. That meant that Eine had already been to Prospit… Karen was on that planet…

Ignoring the voice in his head that told him not to move, Cayden ran at Eine. Eine saw this of course, and he readied another ball to fire at him.

I told you not to kill them.

“They have second lives anyways, why should I let them keep getting in my way?”, replied Eine, confusing everyone else who couldn’t hear the black goat.

Do you not see how incompetent these people are? They’ll probably find a way to get themselves killed. Now, leave them alive.

Eine grumbled something and allowed the ball to disperse, instead opting to pick Cayden and the others up with his sprite magic.

“You better not have hurt Karen!”, yelled Cayden.

“And what if I did?”

“I will fucking kill you!”

Eine switched to a mocking tone, “I guess it’s good I didn’t kill the big, bad fox’s sister then, isn’t it.”

Cayden’s anger subsided into quiet contempt, “You won’t get away with this.”

“And what makes you think you can beat me?”

Ed was the next to speak up, “There are people coming, and they’re way stronger than us. When they get here, you’re dead.”
“So, we’re a scratch session, huh? Well, I’m going to guess that I’m the reason they needed to initiate a scratch in the first place, and if that’s the case, I don’t think this’ll be any different.”

Ed was about to speak up again when Cayden gave him a stare that shut him right up. They needed him to think he could win against their dancestors. Cayden knew Eené’s hubris would lead to his downfall.

“Now that we’ve got that out of the way,”, Eide teleported everyone into the throne room, “we kill the queen.”

Candy found that she was surprisingly good at giving motivational speeches. Maybe she would have done good in a team sport. She and the others had been going around trying to calm the panic that was felt by the prospitans. Karen seemed to be doing well enough, but Nick found he was unable to deal with the swarms of questions and pressure to not screw up. Candy had to save him a few times from causing riots.

Overall, everything had calmed down enough to the point where the threat of anarchy consuming Prospit had been mitigated for the time being. It was now nearing the end of the first night on Prospit. Candy and the others regrouped after things settled down.

“Ugh, why are things going so bad?”, complained Karen.

“It’ll be fine. We do need to start looking into potential new leaders, though.”, replied Candy.

“What if you did it?”, asked Nick.

“There’s no way I could do that. I’m not a leader.”

“Sure, you are. You, by far, did the best at calming the people after their queen died. I’m sure you’d do great.”

Candy blushed a bit, “You really think so?”

“We know so! You got this!”, assured Karen, giving Candy two thumbs up.

“Alright, yeah, I can do this! Can it wait ‘till tomorrow, though? I’m getting tired.”, Candy said, yawning right after.

“Sure, I’m tired, too. I mean, who wouldn’t be after a day like this, am I right?”, agreed Nick.

“Then, it’s settled. Let’s go to bed. See you when we wake up!”, said Karen as she split herself from the group.

“I guess I’ll say goodbye too. Uh, bye.”, added Nick before he, too, left.

Candy let out a long sigh and headed home. This was a long night. She was ready to wake up in a body that wasn’t exhausted.

The black queen was dead. Eené had killed her. He now had both rings. This was a disaster. Everything was going wrong.

“I guess I’ll be on my way, now. I need to set up the plan. I’ll leave you here to deal with these lovely guards. Bye.”, Eené let Cayden and the others go, and teleported away. The three were surrounded in moments.

“I’ve got this.” Whispered Edward before he lunged at one of the guards and disarmed them with
a twist of their spear. He threw it to Cayden, who fumbled with it a bit before securing a grip on it. He did this twice more for himself and Darby. In that time, Cayden was already busy fending off guards that still had spears. For some reason, he sensed whenever someone attacked him in a blind spot, as well as whenever someone attempted to fake him out. Falling for any of these would have resulted in a painful death.

Cayden was also able to block blows for his friends at times. He had no idea where this was coming from, but it was keeping them alive, so he didn’t mind. Thanks to Ed’s martial prowess, Cayden’s ability to sense attacks, and Darby’s overall competence in a fight, it didn’t take long to thin out all of the guards.

“We should get home.”, advised Ed, breathing heavily.

“We can’t split up. We should all go to the closest person’s house.”, recommended Cayden.

“I’m fine with whatever, as long as I don’t die.”, said Darby.

“My place isn’t too far. Let’s go there.”, offered Edward.

“Fine.”, agreed Cayden and Darby simultaneously.

The three made their way back to Edward’s house without being seen, and they went out like lights. They were all ready to be back in their homes again, and hopefully, their dancestors would be able to fix everything that had gone wrong.

If the calculations were correct, the meteor would be arriving tomorrow. Today was the last day of rest. Tension permeated the air. After a year of fun, games, and crimes, with the occasional emotional session for good measure, no one felt truly ready for what was soon to come. Not only would they be forced to deal with Eide again, but they would have to deal with whatever happened in the new session, as well. There was also the stress that came with meeting their dancestors. There was a lot to think about.

Everyone gathered in what was now dubbed the meeting room to ensure everyone was ready.

“Tomorrow’s the day. Holy shit, tomorrow’s the day.”, Mae was pacing around frantically.

“Finally, we can kick Eide’s ass for real!”, exclaimed Gregg.

“We need to make sure we prepare first. We need these new people at god tier as fast as possible. I’m sure they’ll have some useful classpects we can use. I’m hoping for a life player that can heal people. Having that will give all of us an extra life, essentially.”, Angus explained.

“Where’d you find out that?”, asked Bea.

“Selmers’ planet is heavily based around lore, literature, and art. All I had to do was look at some books, and everything was there. I have extensive knowledge about every classpect. Being a mage of mind helped a lot with that, actually. All it took was one read through, and I had memorized all of them and their powers.”

“If we did have a life player, could we bring my parents back?”, asked Mae.

“That depends on what class they are. If they’re a maid or sylph, definitely. If they’re a witch, probably. If they’re an heir, maybe. If they’re a knight or page, probably. Anything else would require bending the class descriptions to an extreme for it to work.”
“Okay.,” replied Mae. She wasn’t sure how to feel. Hope was one that came to mind, but she knew if she let it in, only to have it taken away the next day, it would probably break her.

Angus spoke again, “We could go that route, but I was actually hoping for the possibility of using the new session’s sprites. They aren’t exactly young, and we’re immortal. If we can get them into sprites, that’d be the best-case scenario.”

“Oh, goddammit! I’m trying not to hope here!”

“You should let yourself hope. Hope is an extremely powerful force, even in its aspect. It’s okay to get your hopes up every once in a while.”

“There’s a hope aspect? I guess there was that one time Karkat mentioned it.”, pondered Bea.

“There is a hope aspect, and it is extremely powerful. I hope we get one of those, too.”

“Correct me if I’m wrong, but it seems like you’re thinking about our dancestors more as tools than people who are technically our family.”, said Bea.

“That wasn’t my intention, but it’s still hard to think of them as family. I’m trying to reserve judgment until we actually get to know them.”

“You sure you’re ready for this?”, asked Gregg, concerned.

“Yes, I’m ready. I’ve had a year to get over the fact that I’m meeting people who are only my parents by weird, cross-universe genetics. That just doesn’t mean I’m going to think of these people I’ve never met as family.”

“Fair enough.”

Lori spoke up, “So, just so we’re clear, once we’ve introduced ourselves, the first thing we’re doing is killing their Eide if they have one, right?”

“That would probably be best.”

“Then, we rush our dancestors through their gates and to god tier as fast as possible?”

“Mhm.”

“And finally, we kill our Eide and win the game. Is that all good?”

“That’s about the best we could come up with, considering how little information we have.”

“Alright, who’s ready for more magical adventures?”, Bombshell said in an optimistic voice. She wanted to try and rally everyone up for a new session.

“I am!”, exclaimed Mae as she tried to pump herself up.

“Yeah, let’s go!”, joined Gregg.

“I’m as ready as I’ll ever be.,”, added Bea.

“Same here.”, said Angus.

“Yeah, let’s do this!”., Lori gave a much better rallying cry than Bombshell, especially with some heart magic sprinkled in.
“As long as we don’t die, I’m ready for anything.”, added Germ.

“I’d say about the same thing.”, agreed Selmers.

Lori took over the job of rallying the team, “Let’s show Eide and anyone who tries to get in our way what Possum Springs is made of!”

“I thought you hated Possum Springs.”, said Mae.

“Obviously, it did something right if it brought all of us together. Now, on three, everyone yell Possum Springs.”, Lori put her arm out, and everyone got together to give one big shout to end the day.

“One.”

“Two.”

“Three.”

“POSSUM SPRINGS!”
Chapter 18

Candy woke up back in her normal bed. She felt relieved until she realized that there was still a game to be played. Her dancestors were set to arrive soon, though. Hopefully, they would get along.

The first thing Candy did was get some cereal. While she ate, she opened up her laptop and went to start a video chat. John beat her to the punch, though. She joined John’s voice chat, as did everyone else.

“How was your sleep?”, asked John.

“Terrible. Eine’s got both rings, now.”, replied Cayden.

“He got yours, too?”, inquired Candy.

“Well, that’s not great news, but it’s certainly fixable. They should be here soon.”, assured John.

“Our dancestors?”

“Yes. I’m actually excited to see how this plays out. You’re all really cool people. I know you’ll get along.”


“I’d expect them within the hour.”

“Wow, it’s really that close?”

“Yes. Now, by doing some scouting, they should be landing on Candy’s planet.”

“Should we all gather there to meet them?”

“Yeah, let’s do that. We need to make good first impressions.”, agreed Karen.

“Alright, we’re on our way.”, said Cayden. Everyone began flying to the gates they knew would lead to Candy’s house. John had explained how that worked, so it wasn’t too hard. They just needed to make some jetpacks, and they were set.

Soon, everyone had found their way to Candy’s house, and they waited anxiously for their dancestors. Her planet wasn’t too bad. She had the land of rain and prayer. It was always raining lightly, and there were various church-like structures in the area. Nerves were high, especially among those who had questionable relationships with their dancestors in the original universe.

Darby was the first to spot the meteor, “Here they come.” She pointed up, and everyone looked to the sky. There it was. It was only a dot at the moment, but it was growing rapidly. Silence filled the air as everyone awaited the new arrivals. The next few minutes seemed to drag on far too long, but eventually, they could make out eight figures on the meteor. One of them seemed to be struggling to reign in the meteor. It stopped a few hundred feet above them.

Eight people floated down, all wearing tacky costumes.

“There are only six? What happened to the other two?”, wondered the bear with the red costume.
“Their timeline is probably different. They probably didn’t meet your two dancestors.”, answered another bear, this one wearing green.

“We should probably introduce ourselves. They keep staring at us.”, prompted the crocodile with a brown costume.

“Hi! My name’s Mae! How are you?!”, Mae called as she and everyone else floated down.

“We’re good, thanks.”, replied Candy.

“Alright, it’s time for the meet ‘n greet! Woo! My name’s Greggory! You can call me Gregg, though.”, Gregg greeted, extending his hand out to Cayden. The cheerfulness of Gregg made Cayden feel at home. He was just like his father.

“Hi. I’m Cayden.” Cayden returned the handshake.

Angus walked up to Karen. He could already see the reservation in her eyes.

“Uh, hi. It’s Angus, right?”

“Yes. Nice to meet you.”

“Well, I’m Karen. Um, I guess I should start by saying how sorry I am about… everything.”, Karen looked ashamed and afraid.

Angus held Karen by the shoulders to face him, “Let’s get this out of the way now. I don’t want you worrying about anything that my mother did to me, okay? That isn’t on you.”

“Are you sure? You don’t have to be nice to me if you don’t want to.”

“I’m positive. I’ve had a lot of time to think about this, and I decided not to let some jerk from another universe change how I feel about you. I’m willing to be friends as long as you’re someone worth being friends with.”

“Wow. Thank you so much. I was so worried.”, Karen hugged Angus, and he hugged back.

Bea went to greet Nick, “Hi. The name’s Bea.”

“Nick. Nice to meet you.” Nick couldn’t help but look at Bea’s god tier outfit. Why were they all wearing these?

“I’m guessing this costume makes me look weird, huh?”

“Yeah, what are they?”

“You’ll get one once you’ve god tiered.”

“God tiered?”

“We can explain it later. Let’s just enjoy the moment for now.”

“Sure. What did you want to talk about?”

“Let’s just start with getting to know each other.”

“Okay.”
Edward ran to meet Lori, “Hi, I’m so glad to meet you.”

“Same here. I’m Lori. What’s your name?”

“Edward. Just call me Ed.”

“How’s the game been so far?”, asked Lori.

“Eine has both rings, so that’s a thing.”

Lori snickered, “Eine? Oh, my god. Those people aren’t exactly creative when it comes to names, are they?”

“What’s the name of yours?”

“Eide. They changed one letter. Wow.”

“You guys almost beat Eide when he had two rings, right?”, wondered Edward.

“Yeah. It wasn’t easy, but we did it. We would have won, too, if he hadn’t pulled some crazy stunts right at the end.”, replied Lori, a hint of pride in her voice.

“So, can you help us?”

“We’ll help you with your problem as long as you help us with ours.”

“What exactly went wrong?”

Lori pointed to Skaia, “He absorbed that. He could have wiped out the entire session in an instant if he wasn’t so bent on ‘making us suffer’.”

“Sounds rough. Did your people collapse the mine, too?”

“Yes.”

“Cool. This is a bit off topic, but what’s with the clothes?”

“I know it’s dumb, but it’s actually really comfortable. You’ll see once you get yours.”

“When do I get mine? Also, I really hope it’s not as dumb.”

“We’ll explain what god tiering is later, and whether it’s dumb or not depends on your classpect. Has John told you yours yet?”

“No. He couldn’t. Something was wrong with his computer. We can still talk to him, though.”

Lori pointed to the heart symbol on her outfit, “I’m a page of heart. I can show you what I can do later.”

“Cool. I’ll look forward to it.”

Germ extended a hand out to Darby, “Germ.”

“What?”, Darby shook Germ’s hand.

“My name. It’s Germ”
“That’s… strange. Mine’s Darby.”

“My real name’s actually Jeremy, but everyone calls me Germ. Also, Darby isn’t much better.”

“Heh, yeah. Darby is a nickname, too. My real name is Dorothy, which I think is dumb, but as a baby, I guess it came out as Darby, and it stuck. What’s the story behind ‘Germ’?”

“I liked it.”

Darby stared him down suspiciously, “That’s it? You liked being called Germ?”

Germ shrugged, “Yeah.”

“Okay. Another thing, what are you wearing?”

“I should really get this thing tailored, shouldn’t I?”

“Yeah, maybe you should. I can see people looking at you funny.”

“I guess I just kind of forgot about it. It’s really comfortable. You’ll see once you get your own costume.”

“As long as it’s not that or the mouse’s, I’m fine.”

“Trust me, if you do get one of these, it’ll be a bit awkward at first, but eventually, people stop staring at it, and then, you stop thinking about it.”

“I’ll take your word for it.”

“So, I guess I should probably introduce myself. I’m Candy.”

“Yeah, I guessed that.”, replied Mae.

“So, I know this is a strange first question, but are you and Madelyn together in this universe?”

“Me and who?”, wondered Mae confused.

“I guess not. She was a bear. You were both laid back people. I liked you both a lot.”

“I… wait…”, Mae turned slowly to Bombshell, who was standing next to her, “Is your name Madelyn?”

“Yep. Surprise.”

“Huh.”

“I didn’t really like it, so I just let all of you call me Bombshell.”

Mae stared in more disbelief than she knew was reasonable at Bombshell, “That’s so weird. Wait, you and I were together in her universe?!”

“I guess that explains why I don’t have a dancestor. We only had the one child.”

“Are you with anyone in your universe?”, asked Candy.

“Oh, yeah. Over there, that crocodile. Her name is Bea, which is short for Beatrice.”, Mae pointed to Bea.
“You’re with Nick’s mom?!”

“Probably best if we don’t think of each other as parents.”

Candy quickly recovered herself, “Uh, right.”

“I wonder why Selmers doesn’t have a dancestor.”

“Wait, her? Isn’t that Selma Ann Forester?”

“How do you know her full name?”

“She’s a famous poet in our universe. There was never the need to live in Possum Springs.”

“Really? Good to know that in some other universe, I made something of myself.”, replied Selmers.

“What about the rest of us? What did we do? Who were we?”, questioned Mae. Candy told her about everyone in her universe.

“Wow, that’s so weird. Just living in a different time period changed everything.”, said Mae in amazement.

“Funny how time works like that, huh?”, added Selmers.

Mae sighed, “As much as I want to keep talking to you, I can see everyone starting to cool down. Angus wants to start. I can see it. We should go gather around him. He’s basically our tactician.”, Mae explained. Sure enough, Angus began to round everyone up to go over the plan.

“Alright, everyone, we’ve had some time to introduce ourselves to our dancestors, and we’ll have plenty more time to get to know them as we go, but right now, we need to get a plan together. I need to know about any current threats in this session.”

“We have a version of your Eide going around with both rings. His name’s Eine.”, answered Edward.

“Do you know where he is?”, asked Angus.

“No. Last I saw him, he teleported away from Derse with the second ring. The black queen is dead.”

“So is the white queen.”, added Candy.

“That’s bad. The war is going to end faster now. We’ll need to hurry if we want to beat the reckoning. We’ll also need to be ready for Eine or Eide at all times. Everyone will be traveling with their dancestors so we don’t get caught without a god tier nearby.”

“What about us?”, questioned Selmers, referring to both her and Bombshell.

“I want both of you traveling together with someone. Bombshell, can you reliably perform that technique you showed me during our trip?”

“Yes.” Bombshell fell into a deep focus as she brought her hands together above her. There was a slight rumbling that slowly grew. With a grunt, Bombshell’s hands clapped together, a wormhole opening in the process above her. “There we go. How’s that?”
“That’s good. We will all keep cell phones on us at all times. If you’re in trouble, message the group chat that I’ll create, and Selmers, Bombshell, and whoever they are with will be able to reach you in a few seconds.”, explained Angus.

“What the hell?! That was so cool! I want powers like that!”, exclaimed Karen.

“You’ll get there, trust me. We’ll make sure you get to be as cool as us someday.”, assured Bombshell.

“We can start with completing some gates. Keep in mind that you need to kill things to climb your echeladder. No stealing kills from the dancestors, got it? Only kill something if they’re about to die.” Everyone from Angus’ group agreed.

“Wait. Before we go, I wanted to ask. Does anyone have sprites that haven’t been prototyped twice yet?”

“We can prototype them twice?”, replied Candy.

Mae’s phone rang. It was John. The first message he sent to the group since that fateful day one year ago was,

GT: You’re welcome.

Mae laughed quietly to herself a bit as tears welled in her eyes.

MB: Thank you.

Mae looked at Gregg, who nodded back. Bombshell took out Mae’s planet and shrunk them down. Gregg stole some breath from the surrounding enemies across the planet and blew all of the dirt off of the graves. There was blood visible, but other than that, the bodies seemed brand new. Mae was confused, but she was too excited to care, so she and Gregg grabbed a body each. Mae grabbed a plastic bag from the kitchen. She had an idea of how to bond her parents together forever.

Mae messaged Bombshell and they grew back to size.

“Bombshell, could you shrink them both down to fit in this bag?”, requested Mae.

“Why?”, Bombshell asked with slight suspicion.

“Just trust me.”

“Alright.”, Bombshell complied and shrunk down both of Mae’s parents into the plastic bag. Mae excitedly threw the bag into the sprite, and sure enough, her idea was correct. The bag, with both of her parents in it, prototyped the sprite. Its face was now a mix of both of her parents, and there was a bible floating in front of them.

“Wait, what happened? Where are we? Who am I?” The sprite seemed perplexed.

“Mom? Dad?”, greeted Mae somewhat expectantly.

“Which one am I? Am I both? Never mind that. Mae, are you okay?”

“I’m fine. What about you? I hope the sudden resurrection wasn’t too startling.”

“I have to admit, I’m a bit shaken right now, but other than that, this feels pretty great. You even gave me a bible for when I’m waiting for you while you’re off adventuring.”, replied the sprite
gratefully.

“The bible was actually Candy’s doing.”, Mae pointed out, pointing over to where the alternate universe Candy stood.

“Candy? Isn’t that one of my names? Is this a scratch session?”

“Yes. That is one of you from a different universe. You died in our universe. Do you remember?” questioned Angus.

“Of course. This is her sprite then?”

“Yes.”, answered Candy.

“Glad to be of service… me? Stan’s here, too, so you’re not entirely like me.”

“I’m sure you’ll make a great guide, especially if you’re part me.”, assured Candy braggingly.

The sprite looked over to Mae with a warm smile, “So, are you happy to see me again, hon?”

“Of course! I was so sad. You were there and then, you were just gone.”, said Mae with slight despair in her voice.

“Well, once again, you have proven that death means nothing in this game. Congratulations.”, replied the sprite jokingly.

“Again? Have you died before?”, asked Cayden.

“Oh, yes, every single one of them has died at least once. I’m pretty sure Bea’s death count is the highest.” The sprite smiled deviously at Bea.

“Hey, that’s not fair! I’m the healer! Of course, everyone’s going to want me dead first!”, argued Bea.

“What about that time you died to a bunch of tiny lizards?”, replied Mae with a condescending smile.

“You got killed by them, too, Mae.”

“That was an army of them!”

“Yes, and you were at the top of your echeladder. You should have been more than powerful enough to wipe them all out.”

“I was still dealing with mental issues, okay? I couldn’t use my powers correctly.”

Angus knew he had to step in, or they would be stuck here for the next couple of hours. “Geez, it’s only been a year, and you two are already arguing like an old married couple. I guess Gregg and I need to step up our game if we’re going to compete with this.”

That got Mae and Bea to shut up almost immediately. They both seemed a bit embarrassed. Everyone laughed a bit at the blooming couple.

“Wait, so is dying really that meaningless?”, asked Cayden.

“I wouldn’t say that. For now, you all essentially have two lives. If you die while awake, someone
has to kiss you, and your dream self will assume the role of your waking-self. If your dream-self dies, you just wake up. Once you reach the top of your echeladder, which, if you didn’t know, is like your level in an rpg, you can god tier by killing yourself on either your quest bed on your planet if both of your selves are alive, or the sacrificial slab in the center of Prospit or Derse if one of them is dead. Once that happens, only heroic or just deaths, acting good or evil when you die, will permanently kill you.”, Angus explained.

“Why is this so complicated?”, wondered Nick.

“Trust me, I know how you feel. I wondered that, too. Sadly, there is no answer. You’re just gonna have to learn to deal with all of this game’s crazy antics.”, replied Mae.

“For now, all you need to know is that we will be kissing your corpses if you die. I’m sorry if that’s weird, but it’s better than dying.”, added Angus.

“So, what now?”, asked Candy.

“Now, we get to go on epic quests and kill giant monsters!”, exclaimed Gregg. “Come on, Cayden, let’s go!” Gregg grabbed Cayden and flew up to the second gate. Cayden only sat there confused and being dragged away by a hyperactive fox.

“I guess that’s our que to get going.”, said Angus. “We’ll meet back here after the first gate. Move out.”

Everyone dispersed and went with their dancestors to go oversee their gate completion.

“Who should we go with?”, wondered Bombshell.

“Let’s just cycle around and make sure no one dies.”, suggested Selmers.

“Alright, that’s fine. It’s going to be hard work opening up all of those portals, though.”

“We can always just fly around. With my time powers and your ability to speed us up, we could easily get from planet to planet through flight.”

“Nah, I could use the practice.”

Selmers shrugged, “If you say so.”

Just like in the old session, everyone’s first gates had an ogre guarding them. Candy, with quick reflexes and use of her hope shield, was able to down the foe with ease.

“That shield is pretty cool. Is that all your powers can do?”, asked Mae.

“I don’t know. I’m sure there’s more. I’m just not good enough yet to use them. I’m not exactly full of hope right now.”

“There’s your problem. You can’t fully harness your aspect until you embed it deep into your mindset. Take me for example. At first, I let my disassociation get in the way of using my powers. I was afraid of it. Now, I use how that made me feel, that powerlessness and fear, and I use it to empower my ability to steal rage from people.”, explained Mae.

“You’re a thief of rage, right?”

“Yes. I steal rage from others and I use it to fuel my own attacks. I’ve even learned to steal my own rage. It puts me into this sort of limbo state where I’m consumed with rage, but I can’t express any
of it, so my focus is at its best when I do that. The downside is, when it ends, I go into an emotionless trance for a little bit to recover from stealing all of my anger.”

“That sounds like a lot.”

“It’s a part of expanding your powers. I’m sure you’ll be able to do all kinds of crazy stuff once you master your powers. Like, you can make shields now, but what if you could hope anything into existence? I remember John’s friend, Karkat, mention something about how he couldn’t hope things into reality because he wasn’t a hope player, but you are! All you need to do is let yourself hope. Don’t let Eide,Eine, or anyone else hold you down.”

“Yeah, I can do this. Let’s go complete this first gate.”, said Candy with slightly more resolve.

“Lead the way.”

Cayden was able to defeat his ogre simply by standing at a vantage point and slowly picking away at the ogre with his gun until it died.

“Not exactly flashy, but it works.”, said Gregg.

“Being flashy is what’s going to get us killed. We need to play it smart whenever we can.”

“You sound kind of like Angus. He was always trying to keep us out of bad situations.”

“I looked up to him a lot. I feel like Karen took more after you, and I took after him.”

“If that’s the case, make sure you take care of her. If she really does take after me, chances are, she’s going to do some stupid stuff just for the hell of it. She’s going to need you there when she falls to pick her back up.”

“I know. I almost failed at that once already. I know how bad it can be if I mess up.”

“Did something happen?”, asked Gregg sympathetically.

Cayden explained to Gregg the incident in high school where he almost lost them their parents.

“Bea became a lawyer?”

“Yeah. She’s the reason we’re still together.”

“Man, I thought Angus and I had it bad being the only gay couple in Possum Springs, but that sounds so much worse.”

“I should have been more careful. I should have known. I almost cost us everything.”, said Cayden guiltily.

“You may take more after me than you think.”

“Really?”

“Sometimes, I used to lay in bed at night and cry over how I thought I was a bad person. I made a lot of mistakes, sure, but letting them hurt me so bad after the fact only made them worse. I don’t want that for you, so don’t let that bother you, okay? It’s over now.”

“Karen shouldn’t have had to go through that. She didn’t deserve it.”
“If she still resented you for something like that, you would know it. Everything’s fine. If you really need to, just ask to talk to her about it. You’d be surprised how quickly that can fix your problems.”

“Okay, I will. I guess now’s a better time than any.”

Gregg gave Cayden a hard pat on the back, “Alright. Let’s go do some adventuring!”

Nick pulled out his pogohammer to fight the ogre.

“What the hell is that?” questioned Bea, who was struggling to keep herself from laughing.

“John gave it to me. He said it was really good early game. From what I’ve killed with it, it doesn’t seem too bad.”, answered Nick.

“No, you are not using that. As funny as it would be to watch you try to kill that thing with what is essentially a sideways pogo stick, I’d rather you not die fighting the first mini-boss in the game.”

Bea’s phone buzzed.

GT: It’s good, I swear.

BS: What about that hammer Selmers has?

GT: …right. Probably should have remembered that.

BS: Yeah, you probably should have.

Bea shook her head as she went to message Bombshell.

BS: Hey, can you bring Selmers over here?

Bs: Sure. Just give me a sec.

A few seconds later, Bombshell came through a portal followed by Selmers.

“What’s up? Long time, no see.”, greeted Selmers.

“Can he have that hammer you got from your denizen?”, Bea requested, pointing to Nick.

“I don’t think he can use it. It’s too big.”

“Have Bombshell shrink it.”

“Oh, right.” Selmers took the Fear No Anvil out of her captchalogue, and Bombshell shrunk it to a usable size.

“Here.”, said Bombshell as she threw the now usable legendary hammer to Nick.

“Woah, this is so cool!”

“Try it out.”, prompted Bea.

Nick ran to the ogre, who roared when he came into view and swung the hammer into its kneecap. It was them frozen in time.

“What happened? Selmers, is that you?”, asked Bea.
“No, I’m not doing anything. It must be a special property of the weapon.”

“Talk about overpowered.”, added Bombshell.

Nick then started beating the ogre with the Fear No Anvil again and again. A few moments later, the time effect ended, and it exploded into grist. Bea, Selmers, and Bombshell flew down to where Nick fought the ogre.

“It looks like you got really lucky when you chose hammers as your weapon.”, said Bombshell.

“Wow, this thing is great. It looks so cool, too.”, remarked Nick, examining the hammer more closely.

“Well, you’re welcome. I hope you have fun with it.”, replied Selmers.

“I will. Thank you.”

Angus was skeptical about Karen’s choice of weapon at first, but as he saw it in use, he grew to find a lot of advantages to using a yo-yo. It had its drawbacks, of course, such as being impractical in short range, but it was great at ranges well outside the range of most enemies. One only had to learn proper distancing and they could hypothetically avoid ever getting hit.

“Huh. I never thought a yo-yo would be useful in a fight.”, commented Angus.

“I’ll admit, I was a bit worried at first, but now, I’m just amazed at how awesome these things are!”, Karen agreed.

“Now, you have to kill an ogre. Can you do it?” Angus pointed to the ogre before the first gate.

“Of course, I can. This’ll be easy.”, assured Karen. She walked up to the ogre and swung one of her bladed yo-yos in a wide, horizontal arc, wrapping it around one of its legs. She pulled, expecting it to topple the giant, but it stayed put. The ogre pulled its leg back, forcing Karen forward, before kicking Karen. She couldn’t hold on to the yo-yo and flew back a few feet.

With only one yo-yo left and a few broken ribs, Karen’s chances of winning had plummeted. Angus knew he couldn’t interfere. If Karen couldn’t kill the ogre, she wasn’t ready to start exploring her planet.

Karen, fueled by adrenaline, kept fighting through her pain. She threw her remaining yo-yo at the beast several times, but it was only leaving small gashes in its assault. One time, the ogre grabbed the yo-yo as it flew at him, taking it and swinging it with Karen on the other end, slamming her into the ground. Karen writhed in pain. That was a few more broken ribs and a dislocated shoulder.

Karen shakily stood. The ogre had let go of the yo-yo. She was on the verge of passing out from the pain. Broken ribs were no joke. Every breath caused her immense pain, and her right arm was useless. Swapping the yo-yo to her left hand, Karen knew she had to win. She couldn’t let Angus down like that.

Karen swung the yo-yo in a wide arc again, but this time, she aimed for the ogre’s neck. It wrapped around just like she wanted. The blades kept it secure as Karen pulled with all of her might. She was going to choke the ogre to death. It grabbed at the string in an attempt to break it, but it was made of some strange metallic material, and it couldn’t find the strength to free itself before it exploded into grist, leaving the first yo-yo to fall to the ground.

Dropping her yo-yo, Karen soon found herself slumped against a nearby wall. She clutched her
broken ribcage with her good arm. Angus was next to her immediately to make sure she wasn’t going to die. He messaged Bombshell and told her to bring Bea to him.

Bombshell heard her phone buzz. She opened it to find that Angus messaged her.

AD: You need to get Bea over here.

Bs: Okay.

Bombshell opened a portal, “Bea, Angus needs you.”

“What for?”, asked Bea.

“He didn’t say.”

“Let’s go. I hope it isn’t something too bad.”

Bea, Selmers, and Nick followed Bombshell through the portal. They saw Angus knelt down next to a broken Karen. She wore an agonized expression as she struggled to breathe.

Bea ran over to them, “What the hell happened?!?”

“Her ogre almost beat her to death. You need to heal her.”, Angus demanded.

“What about her sprite?”, asked Bea.

“One prototyped herself into hers.”

“Damn. I can’t do anything until we relocate that shoulder. If I healed her now, the arm would be permanently healed in that position.”, explained Bea.

Angus sighed, “Karen, this is going to hurt. It’s going to hurt a lot, but we need to do it. Just be strong.” He grabbed Karen’s arm, causing her to gasp a bit. With a sickening crack, the shoulder snapped into place. Karen screamed, coughing up blood in the process. She sat there, wheezing as Bea immediately got to work with the healing. In a few seconds, any signs of damage were wiped clean. Karen still sat there, breathing heavily with tears flowing from her eyes.

“Are you okay?”, questioned Nick worriedly.

Karen stared blankly at nothing, “I’m fine.”

Angus decided to hug Karen, “I’m sorry, I should have done something. I just convinced myself that letting that be your fight was more important than your survival. You almost died because I was being too self-righteous.”

“It’s fine. It’s my fault for being too overconfident. If I had been more careful, that wouldn’t have happened.”

“If everything’s okay now, Nick and I should probably get back to his planet, so we can complete the first gate.”, urged Bea.

“As much as I want to stay to make sure you’re okay, Bea’s right. You are okay, right?”, questioned Nick.

“Yes, I said I’m fine. I should probably get started, too. Good luck.”, replied Karen.
“Good luck.”, repeated Nick as he walked through a portal that had been opened by Bombshell.

After everyone had left, Karen stood, “I’m ready. Let’s go.”

Angus nodded, and Karen retrieved both of her yo-yos. Karen walked through the first gate with Angus following close behind.

Edward stood to face his Ogre. He had his rocket gloves and boots on. He bent both of his knees and sprung himself off, activating all of his rockets at the same time. Both of his fists were sent hurling into the monster’s face at incredible speeds. After he made impact, it took a few seconds to reorient himself, which he was lucky enough to receive from the ogre, who was clutching its face, attempting to recover from the blow.

It didn’t take long to get used to having rockets propel his strikes, and soon, every strike became efficient and precise. The rockets also allowed him to dodge in the air really well. Lori was impressed. Her fight with her ogre hadn’t gone nearly as good. Ed soon stood over a pile of grist, triumphant.

“Not bad. It’s almost like you’ve done this before.”, Lori complimented.

“I have been doing martial arts for a few years. That felt entirely different, though. I feel so cool!”

“That was pretty cool. I’m glad you didn’t do as bad as I did when I fought that thing.”

“You had a hard time with that?”

“Yeah. I was fourteen, and I didn’t have any training like you. I could probably one shot one of those now, but back then, I would have died if my mom wasn’t there to heal me.”

“Did you prototype your mom, too?”

“You prototyped your mom? So did I. Where’s yours?”, asked Lori, looking around to find the sprite.

“She’s over there.”, replied Edward as he pointed at one of the corners of the house. She was floating half-covered by the house. When Lori spotted her, she waved. The sprite waved back.

“I’m guessing you haven’t prototyped a second thing yet?”

“Nope.”

Lori seemed deep in thought for a few moments, “I have an idea.” She took out the medallion used to summon her sprite and activated it. Her mother appeared in front of her.

“What do you need?”, asked the sprite.

“I want to see what would happen if you fused with that sprite.” She pointed to Ed’s sprite.

“Are you sure? I won’t be your sprite anymore.”

Lori nodded, “Yes. He needs you more. I want you to train him. He has the potential to become something great.”

“If you insist.” Lori’s mother floated over to Ed’s sprite, explaining what Lori had requested. They both nodded, and Lori’s sprite prototyped itself into Ed’s. They were now Myerssprite^2.
“Well, this feels weird, but I like it.”, said the new sprite. It pointed at Edward, “You’d better be ready for some grueling training because I feel more powerful than ever before.”

“As much as he’d probably love to, we really need to finish the first gate. We can do it once we get back, okay?” Lori began leading Ed to the gate.

“Aw, man, I wanted to fight her.”, whined Ed, looking back at the sprite.

“Don’t worry. This won’t take too long.”, assured Lori as she pulled Edward through the first gate.

Germ gave Darby half of his explosives collection. With one plasma grenade, her ogre died.

“Nice. You really have quite the collection, don’t you?” commented Darby.

“With all the time I had getting here, I got a lot of grinding done. All of this was the result of a year of experimentation. That wasn’t even one of the cooler explosives.”, replied Germ.

“Well, I guess we’ll have to try them all, so I can see all of the cool ones, won’t we?”

“Yes, we will.”

“Let’s go, then.”, urged Darby as she walked through the first gate.

All six parties had now entered the first of seven new gates. Six groups, six more planets to explore. The new adventure has now truly begun.
On Derse, anarchy was beginning to take hold as everyone panicked over the loss of the queen. What would the king do? He might kill the entire royal staff for this! Everyone was terrified and there was no one to curb that fear. At this rate, Prospit might win on its own now that Derse was in shambles.

Jack, however, had a plan. Being the queen’s personal assistant, he knew the ins and outs of how to run everything. Donning a suit and a nice fedora, Jack stepped into the throne room, where several guards were freaking out over the death of the queen. Jack yelled as loud as he could to get their attention, and they all snapped to meet his gaze.

It didn’t take long for Jack to have everyone on board with him claiming rule of Derse. He ordered a message to be sent out to all of the deresites to make them aware of their renewed leadership. Jack was going to lift Derse from the ashes and start a new era. First, he had to gain more power, and with the queen’s ring stolen, he had no clear way to attain said power.

Eine saw this display and thought this might be a good way to speed up the game even more as well as gaining an ally in the new leader of Derse. Eine appeared in front of Jack, the surrounding guards bringing their weapons up at the ready. He was unfazed by this, however, and he took off the ring that hadn’t fused with his sprite body. He threw it to Jack, who reacted just in time to catch it.

Eine knew this was a dangerous play. There was no guarantee that Jack would be completely cooperative, especially after being given this much power. The last thing Eine wanted was to be forced to kill the person who, so far, had been responsible for reigning in the chaos that had spread. Eine hadn’t expected things to turn sour so fast, but he expected the same had happened to Prospit, if not more.

Jack put on the ring and felt all of the power rushing into him. He looked at Eine, who extended out his hand.

“I want to make a deal.”, said Eine.

Mae and Candy were busy exploring her planet. Examining the various churches and sanctuaries yielded the discovery of a society of lizard men and women who devoutly worshipped seven hooded figures that could be found depicted on various stain glass windows. There were three on either side of one main one, a large, serpentine creature. That was probably the leader.

In general, these buildings seemed safe from the monstrosities that plagued the outside. There were more creatures on this planet than anything Mae had seen before. They had to move from building to building to avoid death, or at least Candy’s death.

“Do you think those seven gods or whatever actually exist?”, asked Mae.

“Why would any god allow this to happen? Our god didn’t exist, so this one probably doesn’t, either.”, replied Candy with a stoic tone.

“I actually met something that said it wasn’t god, but it at least seemed to be a higher being. It said the universe didn’t care about us, that we lived monstrous existences. It showed me a being even greater in power than it, and I was terrified. After that, I stopped dreaming for a little while, but it started again a few days later.”, explained Mae.
“So, god exists, but it doesn’t care?”

“That’s what I got from it.”

“I think that might be worse.”, Candy walked with her head down toward a building larger than the others they had seen. There was a cluster of enemies coming out of the entrance.

“Candy, wait. We should hide. There are a lot of them.”, urged Mae.

Candy didn’t respond. There was something wrong. Mae felt something very familiar welling up inside of Candy. Her hopeful aura was gone, replaced by a burning sense of despair and hopelessness. It filled her with… rage.

Candy opened by summoning her weapon and swinging it in a single motion, killing an imp. There were a few imps, a dog-like creature, and a long, lizard-like monster. Candy was cutting them all down with a series of blows fueled by anger. Once she had taken them all down, she burst into the large sanctuary. Standing there, was one of the figures from the stained-glass murals.

“So, you don’t care, either.” She looked behind him, seeing a runic circle that was summoning more monsters. “You’re the reason there are all of these monsters. Is that just how all gods and holy figures are? Do you like watching us suffer?”

Candy walked slowly at the hooded figure in front of her. It readied a spear of light to throw at her, yet she seemed unfazed by this threat. It wasn’t until Mae tackled her out of the way of it after it was thrown at her that she regained her composure.

“Snap out of it, damn it! What is going on with you?”, pleaded Mae.

“Every time I or someone else hopes, it always gets thrown back in our face. What’s the point?”

“Then, stop believing in false gods. It won’t get you anywhere now that you know the truth. Believe in yourself. You’re the one who’s going to win and free everyone, not some god.” Mae whipped her bat behind her to deflect a blow from another holy spear.

“I’m not powerful enough to do god’s work.”

“If you want to become strong enough, keep fighting and keep making yourself stronger. Don’t rely on others, especially god, to do it for you. It has to be you.”

“I don’t think I can do it.”

Mae grabbed Candy by her shirt collar and pulled her up to her face, “Don’t you dare! If someone who’s as much of a failure as me can become this powerful, so can you. Now, stand up and kill this lying bastard!” Mae pulled Candy to her feet and pushed her to face the hooded figure.

The enemy fired a searing ray of light, which Candy blocked with a hope shield, this one brighter than usual. A group of enemies spawned from the ritual circle.

“I’ll handle them. You take care of this guy.”, Mae called out. She quickly depleted all of their rage and channeled it through her bat into a ground slam that exploded outward, killing a few of them in one blow.

While Mae quickly dispatched the new arrivals, Candy attacked the robbed being with her bladed tennis racket, swinging it like an axe. Cutting through the cloth of the robes, Candy saw that beneath it, there was only a black cloud. She felt no resistance as she sliced through the mist,
causing a thicker smoke to rise from where she cut and the creature to stumble back.

Candy’s hope rose as she inflicted a decent wound to the boss. She pushed her assault, creating a few more deep cuts and blocking any incoming attacks with either her shield or the hope shield. This hardened Candy’s resolve, and without meaning to, she bathed her weapon in light. With one final swing, she cut the monster in half, joy welling inside of her as grist poured everywhere.

Mae had also finished killing her group of enemies. After taking a quick breather, Candy walked up to the ritual circle and broke it with her hope-infused tennis racket.

“There. That should stop any more monsters from coming out of here.”, declared Candy.

“If this one was doing this, the other six are probably in on it.”

“I guess I’ll just have to hope my friends can take care of the rest. There are seven of them. That’s one for each gate.”

The exit gate opened where the summoning circle was. Candy and Mae walked through, returning home.

Cayden’s planet was the land of night and stars. The landscape wasn’t anything special, but his planet was the only one to have stars in the sky. It was impossible to explain how it worked, but it didn’t matter.

“I haven’t mentioned this yet, but this place is actually pretty beautiful. I bet Angus would love it here. Mae, too. They both loved looking at stars together. I know they both probably miss it now that we’re in a world where stars just don’t exist.”, said Gregg, looking up as he and Cayden walked.

“I was never much of a stargazer myself. I never had time to. I was always busy trying to get through school with good grades, so I could support my family. We always had a hard life. I was going to go to college and get a high-paying job, but it cost too much. I got a job at a convenience store in Possum Springs with Karen, so we could work toward that. I guess that doesn’t mean anything now, does it?”, Cayden explained.

“Sure, it does! It shows you have determination and a good work ethic. I certainly didn’t have that at that age, but Angus changed everything.”

“What is he like in your universe?”, asked Cayden.

“If I had to put one word on it, it would be caring. He cares. He cares because he knows the universe, or I guess it’s multiverse now, won’t do it for him. He cared enough to become friends with a delinquent like me and now, we’re engaged, and I couldn’t be happier.”

“So, he likes astronomy a lot. That’s why you got him a ring like that.”, deduced Cayden.

“Yeah. We should bring him here, or even better, we could bring everyone here! We could just sit on your roof and stargaze. I bet he would love that. Today’s our anniversary, too! It’s been a year since we got engaged. Once we finish this game, we can finally get married!”, said Gregg happily.

“It’s good to see that nothing could keep you apart. Your love survived being in two universes. That says a lot.”, Cayden commended.

Gregg absently swung a knife in the direction of an imp, sending a blade of wind through them.

“We need each other. As much as he saved me, I need to remember what I did for him. I like to
think I saved him from his childhood, just like he did for me.”

“It makes sense why you love each other so much. You’ve both done everything you could for each other.”

Gregg gave a small laugh, “I would be lying if I said that was the only reason I loved him. He does have a pretty fine ass.” His voice was full of a sarcastic swagger that made it clear he was joking, at least somewhat.

Cayden sent a look of discomfort to Gregg, “Really?”

“Yeah! Come on, you saw it, didn’t you? You’ve got to admit, it is attractive as hell.” Gregg gave Cayden a playful elbow jab.

“I’m not gay, though.”, replied Cayden defensively as he began to blush a bit.

Gregg sighed dramatically, “I guess you’ll just never be able to appreciate an ass so fine. I feel sorry for you.”

“I’m sorry if you talking about the ass of someone who is kind of my dead dad makes me a bit uncomfortable.”, said Cayden.

Gregg placed a hand on his back, “Aw, come on, dude. I didn’t mean it that way. I was just joking around. We can stop if it’s making you uncomfortable.”

“Thanks.”

Gregg threw his head back, “Ugh! I forgot how long these took. There’s like, nothing to do. I hope we at least find a village soon. Let’s just hope the people on this planet aren’t murder-crazy.”

“There are people here?!”, exclaimed Cayden.

“Yeah, they’re these small lizard people. Some of them are cool, but others just want you dead. Like, on my friend Bea’s planet, a bunch of people were slaves. Bea tried to help them, but they killed her. Then, Selmers managed to start an uprising. I don’t even know how she managed to find a fraymotif vendor after it started. Mae was eventually the one to win the battle for them, but she almost died, too.”, Gregg explained.

Cayden was barely able to make out a small shape in the distance. “Wait, is that them?” He pointed at the small building.

“Let’s go see!”, urged Gregg as he began running.

“Hey, wait up!”, yelled Cayden as he followed Gregg. Soon, Cayden’s suspicions were confirmed when a small village came fully into view, consorts and all. It seemed like a nice town, but Cayden felt a sense of unease. Something was wrong.

“Nice! It looks like you got normal lizard people.”, said Gregg.

“Gregg?”, called Cayden quietly.

Gregg took immediate notice at the worry on Cayden’s face. “What’s wrong?”

“Something’s not right. I feel like we’re in danger, but there’s nothing to be afraid of.”

“Is this because I told you about Bea’s planet? Look, I can already tell it’s not like that here, so
stop worrying, okay?”, comforted Gregg.

“No, it’s not like that. I can feel something dangerous coming. We need to help these people.”, warned Cayden, his voice growing more urgent.

Gregg looked around for whatever Cayden may have been talking about, but he found nothing. He pondered for a moment what could be causing him to feel this way. A conversation with Angus came to mind.

“So, there are four more aspects, right? What are they?”

“Well, let’s see. There’s light, hope, life, and doom.”

“What’s doom? That sounds really cool.”

“Well, from what I’ve read, doom is the aspect of inevitability. The mindset of a doom player tends to revolve around the set path of the universe, especially the inevitability of death. They have power over that path.”

Gregg realized that Cayden may be experiencing the early stages of doom powers. He might be a seer or mage since he didn’t seem to have any direct powers over his aspect, but that could just be speculation.

“Cayden, I need you to focus. Try to tell me exactly what’s wrong.”, requested Gregg.

“I see something… that way.” Cayden pointed to where he sensed a threat. Gregg took him and flew, knowing it would be faster than running. They made it just in time to see an ogre, this one bigger than the original, reaching the village. The locals began running away.

Cayden took out his pistol and fired as fast as he could pull the trigger. The ogre took notice and ran at them.

“Fly me up!”, commanded Cayden. Gregg complied, bringing him just out of reach of it as it attempted to grab them. Cayden thought they were safe, but the ogre still had the power of Eine, and thus, the power of the black goat. It threw a ball of eldritch magic at them. Gregg couldn’t see past Cayden, so he couldn’t react before the ball hit them, sending Cayden flying out of Gregg’s grasp.

Gregg stopped Cayden from colliding with the ground with some wind, but he was still injured, having taken the brunt of the damage. He could still walk, but running was out of the picture. Gregg wished he had a sprite to summon so Cayden could be healed.

Cayden stood, putting most of his weight on his left leg. His right leg wasn’t broken, but it was hurt. Cayden fired more rounds into the ogre, but it still lumbered toward him. Gregg stole the breath from it and created a strong wind, pushing it back. He held the ogre in place with the wind while Cayden shot at it. Eventually, the ogre was defeated, dropping a large pile of grist when it died. The gate opened, and Gregg helped Cayden to it.

“It sucks that we didn’t get to explore the town more.”, said Cayden.

“We can always find our way back here again later. We need to get you healed up. That blast couldn’t have been easy to take at your level.”, replied Gregg. When they got back to Cayden’s house, they had the sprite, which was still only a tissue, slowly heal him.

Nick’s planet was the land of skyscrapers and storms. Towering buildings laid over the horizon.
The sky darkened, and it began to rain. It was a downpour. Then, the thunder and lightning came.

“What is going on? Why is there a storm all of a sudden?”, wondered Nick.

“I don’t know. I wish I had something better than this damn dress to wear.”, complained Bea.

The wind suddenly picked up drastically. Nick could barely hold his ground, but Bea seemed just fine outside of the fact that she was covering her face with an arm.

“Come on. I’d like to be out of here as soon as possible.”, said Bea, ushering for Nick to follow. Luckily for Nick, the wind died down enough for him to walk at a decent pace.

“I hope the storm doesn’t reach my house.”, said Nick, concerned.

“I’m sure it’ll be fine. I doubt the game based on building up a house would just destroy said house like that.”, assured Bea.

“I guess.”, replied Nick, still unsure.

The two walked in silence for a few minutes until Nick broke the silence.

“So, how are you?”, he asked awkwardly.

“I’m great. I love being completely drenched after only ten minutes of walking.”

“I’m sure it won’t be too much farther.”

“Trust me, we’ve still got a long way to go. You can’t even fly.” Bea suddenly remembered she still had her jetpack from before she god tiered. “Wait, I still have a jetpack! We could have been flying this whole time!” Bea groaned as she took out her jetpack and threw it to Nick.

“Wait, are you sure this is safe?”, asked Nick worriedly.

“It’s fine. Just put it on, and let’s go. I want to be out of here as soon as possible.”, replied Bea.

Nick put the jetpack on and started it. The sudden upward motion took him by surprise, but after the initial fear was gone, he felt amazing. Usually, he never got to experience the feeling of being high up due to his job as more of a fixer than a large-scale builder.

“Woohoo! This is great! I can’t wait to be able to fly without a jetpack like you!”

“Trust me, with all of the flying you’ll be doing, it’ll get boring pretty fast.”

“No way! How is it possible to get bored of this?”

“You’ll see.”

They flew for about an hour, killing things as they went. Nick was getting bored.

“We’ve been here for an hour, and all we’ve seen are abandoned buildings and a bunch of monsters. Are we almost done?”, asked Nick.

“I can’t tell you. We get to leave when you either beat a boss or complete some sort of challenge. I don’t know when that’ll be, so let's just keep going and we’ll find it eventually, okay?”

As if on cue, the storm intensified, this time even stronger than before.
“Damn it! Get inside that building. We’ll have to wait out the storm there.”, commanded Bea. 

Nick reached the ground just in time for his jetpack to stall, causing him to almost fall forward.

“This sucks. I’m freezing and wet.”, complained Nick.

“Tell me about it. I thought our planets were bad, but this is something else.”, agreed Bea.

“That’s just my luck. I wish I had wind powers like Gregg. That could be really useful right now.”

“How do you know about that?”, wondered Bea.

“John told us. What are you?”

“I’m a sylph of blood. I heal through blood. That’s how I healed Karen earlier.”

“That makes sense.”

“Maybe you’re a breath player, who knows?”, said Bea.

“That would be cool. Is there a way to tell beforehand without John?”

“Well, a classpect is generally based off of your personality. Breath players are very carefree. Blood players care a lot about their friends and family.”

“I’m probably the opposite of breath. I tend to get my mind either so stuck on something that anything anyone says to dissuade me falls completely flat, or I just can’t make a decision at all. It’s my fault Eine has the first ring. I thought giving it to him was the only way to get him to stop, but that was dumb of me to think. Candy wanted me to fight and I just sat there.”, explained Nick.

“If you think you’re the opposite of breath, you might be a prince or bard. Maybe even a page. Bards and princes destroy their aspect, while pages start of weak in it but grow to exploit it. They all tend to be the embodiments of a deficiency in an aspect or just the opposite of it. This isn’t true in all cases, though. Like, Germ, I’m not sure what to make of him. He’s so strange that I couldn’t really see anything to indicate him as any classpect, but he’s a bard of void.”

“I guess that could be true. How long does it usually take to manifest your powers?”

“It depends on the class. It took Lori a few days to discover hers, but she was a page, so her progression was naturally slower. It really depends on how in tune you are with your aspect.”

At that moment, the building they were in began to rumble. It was going to collapse.

“Shit! We need to get out!”, yelled Bea.

“But, we can’t make it out there. We could die!”, argued Nick.

Bea grabbed Nick’s arm and began dragging him out, “If we stay here, we’ll definitely die. We have no choice.”

When they got outside, it was worse than they thought. Bea was flying against the wind as hard as she could, and it was still blowing her back. Nick could barely hang on with both arms as he was pulled back.

“What the hell is wrong with this planet?!”, yelled Bea, barely audible to Nick.
Nick wasn’t sure what to do. There was no way out. The skyscraper toppled over, barely missing Bea and him. Nick knew the only way to survive was to stop the wind somehow. There was nowhere else to hide. Forcing himself to let go of Bea, he threw out his hands, closed his eyes, and prayed that a miracle would happen, and it did. Suddenly, Nick felt the ground, but he wasn’t being pushed back anymore. He couldn’t feel rain anymore, either. He opened his eyes and saw Bea looking at him in awe.

The storm was still there, but there was a small bubble around Bea and him where the wind couldn’t reach. The rain was being blown aside by some unseen force. A gate opened a little outside of the bubble. Nick gave Bea a nod and extended the bubble in the direction of the gate, and they both ran through.

Angus was in wonder at Karen’s planet. Lush plains stretched for miles, and you could see multiple suns in the sky at any time of day. It was the land of sunshine and plains. It was beautiful. He hadn’t really paid attention to it when he was helping Karen scale her house. Sadly, due to the open nature of a plains environment, Angus could also see all of the monsters that acted as black tumors across the otherwise lovely landscape.

A light breeze washed over Karen and Angus as they made their way across the land. Karen did tricks with her yo-yos which impressed Angus. When he had tried yo-yos at a young age, he failed miserably, breaking a lamp in the process. That was probably one of his worst beatings. He stayed in the pantry for three days that time. When he got out, he was gravely dehydrated, but he never went to the hospital and was forced to deal with it by himself. Thankfully, that was only a few days before he met Gregg, or he may have done something he would have regretted.

Angus pushed the bad memory aside and chose instead to focus on Karen’s proficiency with the yo-yo. It really was impressive what she could do, even with razor-sharp blades on each yo-yo.

“Where’d you learn to do all of that?”, asked Angus.

“What, this? You were the one who taught me, actually.”

“Really, me? Was I that good?”

“I did end up becoming better than you, but it certainly took a while. You were really good! Do you not know how to play with yo-yos in this universe?”, wondered Karen.

“I tried once, but it didn’t work out too well.”

Karen could tell something was wrong when he said that. Even someone as stoic as Angus had tells as to when something was up, and Karen found herself able to see these signs easier to spot than most people.

Karen decided to confront the situation head-on. “Tell me what’s wrong.”

Angus was taken by surprise, “Uh, nothing.”

Karen sighed, “I think you’re going to learn very quickly that that won’t work. I want to help you. Just tell me what it was about what I said that hurt you.”

“You didn’t do anything wrong. It was just some unpleasant memories, that’s all.”

“Were they about me?”

“No, she isn’t you.”
“So, it was. What happened? What did I do?”

“I told you, you aren’t her.”

“Just tell me what happened.”, pleaded Karen.

After hesitating for a moment, Angus started talking. “Bea gave me a yo-yo one time. She said she found it lying around, so she took it but couldn’t find its owner. She said she didn’t want it and gave it to me. When I got home, I tried doing some tricks with it, but I knocked over a lamp, and it shattered.”

Karen didn’t like where this was going. She couldn’t help but feel responsible for what he was about to tell her.

“My dad came storming into the room. He screamed at me and began beating me. This time was probably the worst. By the time he was done, I was a crumpled heap on the ground. I couldn’t move. I was in so much pain. My mom threw me in the pantry again, this time for three days, all without food or water. When I got out, I was extremely malnourished and dehydrated, but they didn’t care. They only gave me a bottle of water to make sure I didn’t die and get them arrested.”

Karen was horrified. The more she learned about Angus’ past, the more she felt like throwing up.

“Y’know, it amazes me that you could go through all that and still be as nice as you are. You should hate me, but you keep telling me it wasn’t my fault. How do you do it?”, wondered Karen.

“It’s simple, really. Genetically, you may be her, but you’re not really her. I have to think about this logically, or I’ll go insane. At first, I wanted to hate you. I resented that fact that you were the person who took my childhood from me, but I couldn’t bring myself to harbor any negative emotions against you. Logic and reason are what keep me from being like them. Sometimes, I slip. Sometimes, I come across as too harsh, but if I didn’t force myself to think rationally, my emotions would have broken me. It’s not as bad now, but after having that mindset for so long, I can’t bring myself to change it.”, Angus explained.

“Well, I’m glad you’re here. I can really see my Angus in you. I miss you and Gregg. I feel bad they couldn’t come with us. We left so many people behind just so we could save ourselves.”

“You can’t let it get to you. We left people behind, too. It had to be done. Those people would have died whether we survived or not. Just be glad you were one of the few chosen to have a chance.”

“I guess.” Karen still wasn’t sure. It didn’t feel right that she survived rather than someone who may have deserved it more.

Angus pointed to something in the distance, “Look, it’s a village.”

“Really? There are people here?””, Karen asked.

“Not exactly. There are these small lizard men called consorts. Each planet tends to have a different society based on the environmental conditions of said planet. I was honestly expecting to find some sooner. This planet is so lively.”, explained Angus.

“Let’s go check it out!” Karen began a run to the village, Angus following close behind. He was glad to have a new body that didn’t have asthma. When they reached the village, they found a small, peaceful town. Small huts were scattered about in an unorganized manner. This wasn’t an extremely advanced society, but it was still nice.
The consorts began to gather around the two. They were curious about these strange creatures that had arrived in their town. The gathering did not last long, however, as a consort came and started yelling something that Angus and Karen couldn’t understand. Soon, they were all following them, and Karen decided they should follow them as well.

They were taken to what may have been farmland, at least before a horde of monsters began to ravage it. The lizard people all grabbed some piece of farm equipment that was laying around to fight for their only food source.

“I guess we’re doing this now.”, said Karen. She charged into the middle of the battle with the consorts following her. Once again, Karen’s brashness landed her in a troublesome situation. She had split apart from the group unknowingly and was surrounded while she was focusing on killing whatever she saw. The enemies, being mostly imps, weren’t a threat by themselves, but that’s why they come in packs.

Angus, seeing what Karen was getting herself into, flew in to help her. Karen realized too late that she was trapped. The enemies surrounding her jumped at her all at the same time. She braced herself but heard the activation of magic next to her before any harm came to her. Angus was next to her, a barrier placed around both of them.

“What are you doing? You could have died!”, yelled Angus.

“I just wanted to help, and I guess I got too overzealous.”

“Just don’t go running into a battle without thinking again, okay?”

“Okay.”

The imps were all attacking the bubble to try and destroy it.

“Now, I’m going to drop the bubble. It’ll explode and push them back. Clear a path out of here and keep your distance. That yo-yo has range, so use it.”

“Got it. Whenever you’re ready.”

“Now.” The bubble exploded outwards, pushing all of the imps back. Karen had her eyes set on a clear area and swung her yo-yos in a wide arc in that direction, clearing a path immediately.

“Come on!”, urged Karen. Angus followed her out of the circle of enemies. Karen put some distance between her and the imps, and to her delight, they all grouped up in front of her. She took both yo-yos and swung them from both sides at the same time. It killed a few of them, and one of the yo-yos wrapped around an imp. Karen took it and swung it around, killing a few more with its body before it, too, died.

When the remaining imps tried running away, Karen swung both yo-yos around them, trapping them. She then slowly crushed them all to death. That was the last of them that were near her, and it seemed that the consorts had done a nice job of cleaning up the rest as well.

“See how easy it was once you started taking advantage of your strengths?”, questioned Angus.

“Yeah, that went a lot better after I stopped being a reckless moron.”

The exit gate opened, and Karen was about to exit, but when she looked around her, the landscape was terrible. All of the crops had been destroyed in the attack.
“We can’t just leave them like this.”, said Karen.

“Look, as much as I’d like to help them rebuild, we don’t have the time for that right now. When we win the game, we’ll take all the planets with us, and we can rebuild then, alright?”, argued Angus.

“…Fine.”, Karen conceded. She walked through the gate, and Angus followed.

Edward’s planet was the land of temples and islands. Much of the land was covered in water with islands being scattered across it. The sky was a light blue with little clouds.

“Not bad, especially compared to blood rivers.”, commented Lori.

“So, what, do we just explore?”, asked Edward.

“Yes. We explore until we find whatever this planet wants us to do before it lets us leave.”

“Why are we doing this? Couldn’t we just skip to the final gate and be done with this sooner?”, argued Ed.

“Trust me, you’re not ready to fight the final boss. The point of these is to help you grow so you don’t get yourself killed when you go to fight your denizen.”

“What’s a denizen?”

“It’s basically the final boss of your planet. They’re really hard to kill.”

“That sounds cool.”

“Try saying that when you break your hand trying to punch it.”

“Did you do that?”, asked Ed.

“Yeah. All of my weapons broke, so I had to.”

“How did you win?”

“I had to dig deep within myself and pull out enough power to almost destroy my planet.”

“What?! You can do that?!”, said Edward in amazement.

“Yeah, but I almost missed out on the final fight with Eide because it left me unconscious.”

“Oh, so it’s like a last resort?”

“You could call it that.”

“Cool. Hm, let’s explore that temple over there.” Edward pointed to a tall structure in the distance.

“Okay.”, agreed Lori. They both flew over to the temple. At the entrance, there was a door with four symbols on it. Ed tried pushing it open to no avail. It was locked.

“I guess we have to solve a puzzle with these buttons. I wonder what would happen if I just pushed them in a random order.”, said Edward as he extended his hand out to touch one of the buttons. Lori saw this and immediately gave him a heart aura to protect him. He pushed a button, but
nothing happened. Lori was relieved for an instant until he began pressing more buttons.

“What are you doing?! There could be traps!” There was a click, and the door opened.

“What?”, said Lori in confusion.

“Huh, I guess that was the combination. Imagine that.”

“How did you do that?”, questioned Lori.

“I just went with a gut feeling, and it worked.”

“Please don’t do that again.”, pleaded Lori.

“No promises.”

Ed slowly traversed the temple, taking in the ancient murals on the walls. Depictions of the early life of the consorts was contained on the walls.

“What are those?”, asked Ed.

“Those are consorts. They inhabit every planet, but each planet has its own society. Some are prosperous, and some are not.”, explained Lori.

“Do you think we’ll meet any?”

“Probably not here, but I’m sure if we explore the outside, we’ll find some.”

“That can wait until later then. I want to explore more of this temple. I’ve always wanted to be an adventurer.”

They explored deeper and deeper into the dungeon, which had long since led them underground. They found treasure chests with tons of boondollars, and they killed many enemies. Ed somehow managed to see or unknowingly avoid dozens of traps. It was uncanny. Lori kept a heart barrier around him just in case, but he never needed it.

Eventually, they reached the bottom of the temple. There, sitting on a throne of some sort, was a large, vaguely humanoid monster. It stood when it saw Edward and Lori and immediately attacked, stretching its arm out and swinging it along the ground. Both of them flew over it, but the creature launched its other arm at Edward, aiming it right above him. By some miracle, however, all four of Ed’s rockets managed to stall at the same time, leaving him under the attack, before starting up again before he even hit the ground.

Ed flew at the monster, dodging every attack with ease. Eventually, his luck ran out, and he was thrown to the side by an arm swing. The heart aura protected him, though. He made it the rest of the way to the beast and punched it right where its face would be if it had one. Lori was powering him up all the while, so this attack was very powerful. It left a hole in its head, but it didn’t die.

The hole closed up around Ed’s hand, and the creature picked him up and slammed him into the ground. Lori came and cut through the arm, freeing Edward, who immediately got up and sent an uppercut into the monster’s stomach. There was another hole. Its body was like jelly.

Ed continued putting holes in it until eventually, it was only a puddle on the ground. He kept on punching it, and finally, it turned into grist. The gate back home opened behind Edward.

“Whew, that was a tough fight. It’s a good thing I have you here to protect me.”, said Edward.
“Yeah. Let’s go home. I’ve had enough temples for one day.”

“Same. I can’t wait to explore the rest, though.”, agreed Ed.

The two exited the portal and sat down for a break.

Darby’s planet was the land of holes and fog. The land seemed to be completely empty and void of life. There were also holes everywhere that would kill you if you fell down one.

“I guess the Warton’s are always destined to get garbage planets.”, commented Germ.

“What was yours like?”, asked Darby.

“It was this without the holes or fog and more death.”

“That must’ve sucked.”

“Eh. You really only have to explore them once. Any time after that is purely optional, especially when you have someone with all of the resources you’ll ever need, like me.”

“That’s fine with me. I’d rather spend as little time here as possible.”

The two had fun walking around, talking about their life stories, and blowing things up. Overall, the conversation mostly centered around the cult incident, mostly because they never really got involved in anything too crazy outside of that. Other than that, they played with dynamite, had a pet possum, and made friends with homeless people. That was all completely normal stuff, right?

Eventually, they managed to stumble across a small village.


“Yep. These people are great. They sell you these cool special abilities called fraymotifs.”

“What do they do?”

Germ led Darby over to the fraymotif vendor. “It depends on your classpect and who you do it with. There’s a separate fraymotif for every combination of two people in a session, and they have different effects depending on the powers of the two people. There are also solo fraymotifs, but those aren’t as cool.”

“What is my classpect?”, asked Darby.

“I can tell you your aspect, but not your class. I just need to look at what fraymotifs you have.” Germ talked to the vendor and looked at the inventory. “Woah. You have fraymotifs with all of us, too? You’re a void player, just like me. I am so getting you ours.” Germ bought his and Darby’s fraymotif.

“How do we activate it?”, questioned Darby.

“I think you’ll just be able to do it. There was never a method to doing one. It just happened.”, answered Germ.

“Can we try it out?”

“Sure. It looks like we have a perfect target, too.” A huge cyclops had arrived. The consorts all ran inside to hide.
“Huh, you’re right. It’s the perfect target.” At that moment, the two coordinated their fraymotif, Nihility Duet. Karen was able to find the spot in the cyclops that would take the most damage, and Germ destroyed it with the void. In this case, it was its eye. Without an eye, it was helpless, and Darby finished it by throwing a bomb into the hole left behind. As it turns out, that was the boss they were supposed to face, and the gate opened. They entered, finishing off the last of the first gates.
Chapter 20

When Mae got out with Candy, she received a message from Angus in the group chat.

AD: When everyone’s done with the first gate, we should meet up, so we can decide what the plan is for tonight.

GL: Dude, we’ve got to do it at Cayden’s place! You’ll love it there, I promise.

AD: Why? What’s it like there?

GL: I can’t tell you. I just need you to see it.

AD: Okay, bug, we can do it at Cayden’s.

CL: Shit, my house is a mess!

CB: I’ll have it presentable in a few moments.

CL: What are you Doing?

CB: I’m just moving some stuff around.

CL: What the hell was that?

CB: Uh, nothing.

CL: WHY IS MY SINK IN MY FRONT LAWN?!

CB: I can fix this, I swear.

CL: Candy, I swear to god, I will end you!

Mae decided to back out of that conversation as fast as humanly possible.

“Uh, let’s go to Cayden’s. Come on, let’s get away from the computer. Take this jetpack and follow me.” Mae handed Candy her old jetpack and flew off. She was gone before Candy could argue. Candy reluctantly put on the jetpack and followed Mae.

Once Mae was on Cayden’s planet, she was in wonder at what she saw. Somehow, there were stars or at least something that looked like them. Mae realized how much she had missed the stars. This brought back so many great memories of stargazing with Mr. Chazokov and Angus.

Candy was amazed as well. It was certainly better than her planet. She followed Mae until they eventually found Cayden’s house. Being Cayden’s server player, Candy was the first one there besides Mae.

“Candy, what did you do?!”, yelled Cayden.

“I’m sorry. I decided to start with the kitchen, and I accidentally tore your sink out of the ground. When I couldn’t get it back in, I decided to ditch it, so I threw it out the window, and I was going to fix the floor and window, but Mae forced me to stop.”, Candy explained anxiously.

Cayden mouthed the words “thank you” to Mae and sighed, “I guess we can stay outside. It’s
certainly nice enough.”

After that, they waited for everyone to slowly arrive one-by-one. Soon everyone was there.

“Alright, everyone’s here. I assume most of you are tired. We’d all like to get some sleep soon, but we need to make a plan for what you guys will do once you’re asleep. What are the current status’ of Prospit and Derse?”, questioned Angus.

“Both of our queens are dead. We managed to stop Prospit from falling into anarchy. I don’t know how Derse is doing.”, answered Candy.

“We were thinking of trying to make Karen the new leader of Prospit.”, added Karen.

“That might not be a bad idea. If we let Derse fall into chaos while keeping Prospit intact, we could win the war without having to do more than commanding an army.”, complimented Angus.

“So, the Prospit dreamers know what they’re doing, but what about the Derse dreamers?”, wondered Cayden.

“You need to cause havoc in any way that you can. Kill off guards, even civilians if you have to.”

“We don’t have weapons or offensive powers of any kind. How are we supposed to do that?”, argued Cayden.

“I can help with that.”, said Lori, “My dream self is still outside of the dream bubble. I’ll go to sleep before everyone else, and Bombshell can give me a portal to Derse. I can bring your weapons, and I’ll be sure to cause some chaos while I’m there.”

“Great. Sounds like a plan. Now, we still have some time before we have to head off to bed, so let’s stargaze!”, suggested Mae.

“Woo! I can finally go stargazing with my amazing husband! I was sad we never got the chance to, but now I can!”, exclaimed Gregg as he flopped down on his back. Angus joined him and Mae, too. Soon, everyone was laying around watching stars and sharing a good time together.

“I wonder how there are stars up there. The incinisphere doesn’t have stars, so where did they come from?”, wondered Angus.

“Eh. Let’s just enjoy it, okay cap’n?”, said Gregg.

“Yeah, okay.”

“We should look for new constellations.”, Mae suggested.

“Ooh, that sounds fun! Where should I start looking?”, asked Gregg excitedly.

“Just start anywhere. Try to find a group that looks like something.”

“Woah, that one’s big! It’s getting bigger? Why is it getting bigger? I don’t think stars are supposed to do that. Stars don’t just get bigger, right?”, Gregg questioned nervously.

“It’s not getting bigger. It’s getting closer… Oh no. Everyone up NOW!”, commanded Angus.

“What’s going on?”, asked Bea.

“It’s Eide.”
“WHAT?!”, yelled Mae. Suddenly, Eide teleported in front of everyone.

“I finally found you. That was very clever, trapping me like that, but luck was not in your favor, was it?”, said Eide.

Everyone drew their weapon, ready to fight.

“Oh, that’s cute. You think you’re a threat. Now, after what you’ve all done to me, I’m going to kill you one by one, watching you grieve for every fallen comrade. The question is, who do I start with first? I definitely want to see you suffer.” He pointed at Gregg. “You shot me in the arm with a goddamn crossbow. You’re gonna pay for that. I can’t just kill you, though. That’d be too easy. So, who’ll it be? Your best friend or your boyfriend?”

“If you hurt either of them, I will fucking murder you!”, shouted Gregg.

“Is that a both I hear? That’s so generous of you.”, replied Eide sarcastically.

“Don’t you dare hurt Angus!”, yelled Mae as she flew at Eide.

“Best friend it is!”

Mae consumed the rage of all of her friends as well as most of the surrounding area. Her aura was gigantic. She swung with all of her might at Eide, but he blocked it effortlessly with one arm. He said nothing, only giving Mae a cocky grin as he punched her in the gut. She bent over in pain, clutching her stomach.

“Mae!”, yelled Gregg as he went flying in to help. Angus grabbed him and pulled him back down.

“What are you doing? Let go! I have to help her!”, argued Gregg as he struggled to free himself from Angus’ grip.

“You won’t help her by fighting. We need to leave. We need to hide somewhere. We can’t win right now. I can see it. If we don’t get her and everyone else out of here, someone’s going to die!”, argued Cayden.

“Bombshell, open up a portal. Take us as far away from here as possible.”, commanded Angus.

“Got it.”, replied Bombshell as she began to open up a portal.

“Mae! Get down from there! You can’t win! We need to leave while we still can!”, called Bea. Mae didn’t listen and continued fighting. She continued getting beaten by Eide, but she couldn’t give up. Her friends’ lives were on the line.

Mae was losing. She knew that. She knew there was only one way that she could possibly win. She stole the rage that had accumulated inside of her when thinking of everything Eide did to them. Her true nightmare eyes were back.

Mae was going to put everything into this last attack. All of her anger. All of her rage. This had to end it. She flew full speed at Eide, who seemed completely unaffected by Mae’s sudden power boost. Letting out a battle cry that would make even the most courageous person cower in fear, she pulled her bat back for her final swing.

Eide smiled menacingly. He stuck his hand out, and a bright light shone from it. Candy recognized it as the same light as her hope magic. Mae was brought to a halt as the rage completely emptied from her in an instant. Her face was replaced by pure fear but only for a moment, as Eide placed his
other hand on her and pumped some sort of black energy into her.

The life drained from her entirely, and she fell back to the ground, her body lifeless. Eide floated down over her corpse.

Gregg screamed in anguish, “MAE! NO! YOU BASTARD, I’LL KILL YOU!”

Angus had to grab Gregg again, this time wrapping both arms around his torso.

Bea was in shock. Her world was falling down around her. Tears streamed silently from her eyes.

*She can’t be dead. There’s no way.*

*You have to heal her.*

*You can’t heal her if she’s dead.*

*You can’t just give up on her. You love her!* 

*You can’t lose her.*

*What’s the point?*

*If he’s this powerful, there was never any hope of winning.*

“Let me go, Angus!”, demanded Gregg.

“I’m not letting you kill yourself!”

“But he killed Mae! That bastard killed Mae!” Gregg beat Angus’ arms in an attempt to get him to let go, but Angus wouldn’t budge.

“Dying won’t make it any better! We have to go!”

“We can’t just leave her! We can’t lose her. I can’t lose her... I can’t.” Gregg’s punches slowly died out as he lost the will to fight.

Eide laughed maniacally, “This is more amusing than I thought. Man, I can only imagine what it’ll be like when I kill Angus over there. I really must be going, though. I wouldn’t want to interrupt the funeral. Oh, and I forgot to mention. While I was searching the planets for you, I prototyped myself into every sprite that still needed a second prototyping, so that won’t work. Bye.” He disappeared, leaving everyone to process what just happened.

Almost everyone stood in shock, unable to speak, except for Gregg, who was now sobbing into Angus, and Angus, who was trying as best as he could to comfort him.

Bea walked up to Mae and knelt beside her. She checked for any signs of a pulse in the hopes that she could save her, but she couldn’t find anything. Mae was dead.

“You won’t find anything. That was doom magic. He forced her death. She’s gone. I’m sorry.”, Cayden explained. Bea didn’t know how to react. She knew it was coming, but it still hurt. The pain was indescribable. The only thing she could compare it to was her mother’s death. It was that same feeling.

“What do we do now?”, asked Lori.
“We continue with the original plan.,” answered Angus.

Gregg looked up at Angus, “But what about Mae?”

“We’ll bury her. This game isn’t over yet. It’s not our session. We have to move on. We don’t have a lot of time.”

“What’s the point?”, replied Bea, “Eide’s just going to kill us all one-by-one, and there’s nothing we can do to stop him. Mae died too easily. That was her everything, and he swatted her away like a damn fly! We’re nothing to him. Everything we did was pointless!” Bea was now transitioning between anger and hopelessness uncontrollably.

“She’s just gone? There’s no way to bring her back?”, asked Candy.

“No. That was a heroic death. There’s no way to bring her back unless we had a life player.”, replied Angus.

“What if we have one? I may not be one, but there might be someone.”, suggested Candy hopefully.

“I’m a doom player. Sorry.”, said Cayden.

“I’m a breath player.”, added Nick.

Darby went next, “I’m a void player.”

Ed thought for a moment, “I’m not sure what I am.”

“Did any peculiar things happen to you while you were in your first gate?”, asked Angus.

“He was able to avoid every single trap we came across through sheer luck, but that can’t be a power, can it?”, wondered Lori.

“Actually, it can. He’s probably a light player. Light is the aspect of good fortune and knowledge.”

“Damn it. Sorry, guys.”, said Edward.

That only left Karen, “I don’t remember anything peculiar happening to us, do you? I wouldn’t know if something related to my powers came up at all.”

Angus pondered this for a moment before saying, “No. Nothing notable relating to your powers happened while we were in the first gate.”

Bea and Gregg snapped their attention to him immediately when he said that.

“Please don’t get your hopes up. Her being a life player is only a one in seven chance now, and the chances of her being a life player that can resurrect people are even lower. I’d estimate it at around five to ten percent if we take everything into account.”, warned Angus.

“That’s still a chance!”, replied Bea.

“Fine. We can go to her planet and find an NPC village. They’ll have a fraymotif shop. We can check her aspect there.”

Everyone followed Angus as he left, all of them wanting to know if the possibility existed for Mae to be revived. He managed to find a town within a couple of minutes.
“Is that the shop?”, questioned Gregg urgently.

“Yes.” Angus flew down and landed in front of the shop. The consort seemed a bit intimidated by the large group of aliens that had just shown up at his store, but he offered the inventory to them anyways.

Angus let loose a small smile as he read the contents of the store. Karen was a life player. He didn’t know which class, but the simple fact that she was a life player inspired a vague hope in Angus.

“So, what does it say?”, urged Bea.

“There’s hope. Karen’s a life player.” Everyone was beaming with joy. “There’s still a chance she’s the wrong class, but I could see about half of the classes being able to bring her back.”

Bea was ecstatic for a few moments, but then she remembered what she said before. “Should we really bring her back?” Everyone turned and looked at Bea in shock.

“What do you mean?! Do you think we shouldn’t bring her back?!”, yelled Gregg.

“It’s just… I don’t want her to have to die again. What about Eide? I said this before, we can’t beat him. You saw what he did to her, how easily he just killed her after everything we did. If we bring Mae back, I’m afraid that she’ll die again. She’s died too many times as it is.”

“You and I both know that’s bullshit! If it were Mae’s choice, she’d be back here without a single damn thought!”, argued Gregg angrily.

“You don’t know that! We can’t bring her back unless we win! She’s been through too much!”, Bea yelled back.

Angus hated seeing two of the most important people in his life arguing like this. No one needed this right now. He had to step in.

“Guys, Stop! Now is not the time to argue about this. We shouldn’t even be talking like we’ll be able to revive her. We won’t know until Karen god tiers, so let’s wait until then to make a decision. We can’t have the team falling apart because of an argument over something that isn’t even guaranteed.”

Gregg and Bea gave each other looks of disdain, then regret.

“...I’m sorry. I know you love her, and you just want what’s best for her. I just know she’d want to be there for us.”, Gregg apologized.

“We both want what’s best for her. I know she’d probably want to come back for us, but she makes a lot of rash decisions. To be honest, I don’t know what’s best for her. I need to think about it some more.”, said Bea.

“Let’s sleep on it, okay?”, suggested Angus.

“Okay.”, they both replied in unison.

“Cayden, would you mind making some beds when we get back. We need twelve beds.”, requested Angus.

“What for?”, asked Cayden.
“I don’t want us splitting up for now. We need to be prepared in case Eide comes back.”, explained Angus.

“But we’ll be sleeping. It might be better if he can’t reach us all at once.”, argued Cayden.

“Lori’s dream self will have to take over guard duty. It’s still outside our dream bubble, so Lori can stay here. Sadly, that means she can’t go to Derse.”

“We’ll be fine. I’m sure the people there are in disarray anyways.”, assured Edward.

“At least they’ll come back immediately if they die.”, added Angus.

“Can we sleep now? Today’s been a hard day?”, asked Candy.

“We still have work to do on Prospit, you know?”, replied Karen.

“Yes, but that body has slept all day. This one hasn’t.”

“Fair enough.”

The group returned to Cayden’s house, and Cayden alchemized the beds Angus requested.

“Um, there are thirteen of us, right? Shouldn’t we have thirteen beds?”, questioned Cayden.

“Gregg and I are engaged. We sleep together.”, Angus explained.

“Oh, right. Did Mae and Bea sleep together, too?”, asked Cayden.

“Yeah, we did. I think this will be the first time we haven’t shared a bed since our last session.”, Bea answered.

“I’m sorry.”

“No, don’t be. It’s not your fault.”

“Alright. Good night everyone. Hopefully, tomorrow will be a better day.”, said Angus to the rest of the group. Everyone got into their beds, and Angus hugged Gregg close to lull him to sleep. His emotions were all over the place, and so were everyone else’s, but Gregg tended to feel this more than most people.

Bea laid in bed wide awake, unable to sleep. Her mind was racing with worries about whether to bring Mae back or if they even could bring her back. Being in a bed alone for the first time in a year on a planet completely foreign to her didn’t help, either.

Angus could see this through his mind’s eye, and once Gregg had been carried fully off to sleep, he got up and went over to Bea’s bed, lying next to her.

“You having trouble sleeping?”, asked Angus.

“Yeah. It’s not the same without Mae here. I’m so tired, but I can’t sleep.”

“It’s fine if you need to take a break from adventuring for a while. We can give Nick Selmers or Bombshell and just have the other go with Candy.”, Angus offered.

“No. Nick’s cool. I’d rather be with him than alone.”
“You always have your sprite.”

“It would be nice to talk with them. They probably don’t even know this happened yet.”

“It’s always an option. Is there anything I could do to help you sleep?”

Bea thought for a few moments.

“Just… lay here for a couple of minutes. Is that okay?”

“Absolutely.” Angus laid there with Bea for a few minutes, and he sensed her mind drifting off into the world of dreams. With that, he quietly got up from Bea’s bed and tip-toed back to his and Gregg’s. He got back in next to Gregg and fell asleep in moments.

When Candy woke up on Prospit, she immediately got up and went to find Nick and Karen. It only took her a few minutes to find them both.

“So, how are we going to get the entire planet to love and adore you?”, wondered Karen.

“I think a lot of people like her already. She got by far the least backlash when she went around calming people after the queen died. You can even see it in the fact that in the section she was sent to calm, there’s the least amount of chaos out of all three of ours.”, said Nick.

“You do seem to have quite a way with these people.”, agreed Karen.

“I guess we should just go to the palace then.”, said Candy.

“What do we do when we get there?”, questioned Nick.

“Coup d’état?”, suggested Karen jokingly.

“The queen is dead. There is no government to overthrow.”, replied Candy.

“I meant let’s just go and take over. It’s not like these people have someone in line to be queen after this, right?”

“Maybe they do.”

“We won’t know until we get there. Let’s go!”

Karen flew off, and Candy and Nick were forced to follow. Once they reached the royal palace, they went inside and saw a group of prospitans in the throne room, all of which seemed to be of high rank. They appeared to be passing various documents around.

“Now’s your chance! Go!”, Karen whispered loudly.

Taking a deep breath, Candy walked in, and she stepped up to the throne. The prospitans all looked at her with shock and awe.

“Hear me! Your queen is dead, and you have been left with no leader, but not anymore! I will offer myself as the new leader of this beautiful land of Prospit! I will ensure that those who enacted the queen’s murder be brought to justice, and I will also ensure that Derse falls in the battle for Skaia! Join me, and we will make Prospit more prosperous than ever before!”

The officials in the room looked at each other, and slowly, they began nodding to each other, then clapping. They had accepted Candy. The easy part was over. Now, she had to convince the rest of
Prospit she was a good leader, especially since she would be sleeping half of the time. It was a start, though.

“Woohoo! Congratulations!”, cheered Karen from the back. Nick clapped along with her as well. Candy was now the leader of Prospit.

The story on Derse was a different story entirely. When everyone awoke, they were in prison cells. They were in the dersite prison sector.

“Are you kidding me?”, groaned Cayden.

“Cayden?” It was Darby.

“Darby? Is that you?”

“Yeah. So, this happened.”

“Cayden? Darby? It’s me, Ed!”

“They put us all in separate cells? Why?”, wondered Cayden.

“It doesn’t matter. We need to figure a way out of here.”, said Edward.

At that moment, a guard came to Ed’s cell and motioned for him to be quiet. When he turned to walk away, something extraordinary happened. The master key on the guard’s belt fell off, and he didn’t even hear it.

“No way.”

“What happened?”, asked Cayden.

The sound of Ed picking up the keys and the unlocking of his cell door could be heard. They then heard a small scuffle and the sound of a body hitting the floor.


His call was answered when Ed came up to his cell and unlocked it along with Darby’s.

“Here, take this.” Ed threw the spear he had picked up from the guard to Darby. “I’ll get you one too. Don’t worry.”

“What now?”, wondered Cayden.

“We escape, we find out who put us here, and we kill them I guess.”, said Darby.

“It might not be that easy.”, warned Ed as two more guards came down the hallway.

“I got it.”, said Darby as she pushed her way to the front and fought with the guards. After a few moments, it was clear that she was outmatched when it came to martial combat. Ed managed to save her from being skewered, ripping a spear from one of the guards and impaling them with it instead. While the other guard was stunned by his partner’s death, Darby stabbed him as well.

“Huh. You two are pretty good.”, Cayden complimented.

“Well, now you get to join us.”, said Ed as he gave the last spear to him.
“Thanks. Let’s go.

The three of them carefully snuck through the prison halls. They passed many prisoners, but no one attempted to give away their position. In fact, they even gave them all the keys to their cells which they found on the many guards they’d killed along the way.

Soon, alarms were going off. This was a large-scale prison break.

“This is sure to cause some havoc!”, exclaimed Ed.

“That was our job.”, replied Cayden.

“Look, the exit.” Darby pointed at the front entrance. There was only the front lobby between them and freedom. That was when the front door burst open. Standing there was a dersite, but he was different. He was radiating a dark presence.

“He has one of the rings!”, Cayden pointed out.

“What?!”, said Ed, and the dersite teleported in front of him. Edward tripped backward, which caused him to just barely avoid being decapitated by a demonic, black sword he had summoned.

“Jack! What did I tell you about killing them?!“ Eine had teleported behind Jack “If I can’t trust you, I can just take that ring right back. It wouldn’t be hard.”

Jack silently scowled at him but dematerialized the sword.

“What we do want to do is return them to their cells. You can knock them out, but do not kill them, do you understand?”

Jack simply demonstrated this by chopping Edward in the back of the head, causing him to go limp and fall to the floor unconscious. Darby attempted to spear him, but he dodged and did the same to her. As a last-ditch effort, Cayden threw his spear, and this one actually managed to hit its target. Jack was impaled with the spear.

In a fit of anger, he ripped out the spear and swung the handle into Cayden’s head, instantly knocking him out as well. He knelt down and clutched his wound. He would have died were it not for Eine healing him completely.

“Let’s take these bastards back to their cells. Keep them separated this time.”, ordered Eine. Jack complied and begun carrying Darby and Ed, while Eine carried Cayden. Soon, they were in cells all across the prison facility. There was still the problem of the rest of the escapees to deal with.

“Let them go. They don’t matter. In fact, we could even send them out to fight for us if worst comes to worst.”

Jack nodded, and he returned to his throne with Eine.

Gregg was the first of the pre-scratch players to fall asleep, so he was the first to awaken in the dream bubble. When he woke up, his first goal was to find dream Mae. It wouldn’t be the same as real Mae, but he just needed to see her right now.

He flew through Possum Springs, waving to others as he searched. When his dead self saw him flying, he joined him.

“What’cha doing?”, asked dream Gregg.
"I need to find your Mae."

"Why not just talk to your Mae?"

"She... died. Eide killed her."

"Well, duh.", said the other Gregg, "We already knew that."

"What? How?", questioned Gregg.

"We've already seen her."

Gregg stopped in midair, "Mae's here?!"

"Where did you think she would go when she kicked the bucket? Of course, she's here."

"Please take me to her!", begged Gregg.

"Yeah, sure thing." Dream Gregg flew off towards Mae's house, which is where Gregg had been heading anyways. Once her house came into view, Gregg saw two Mae's sitting on the porch. One of them had their head in their hands. She seemed incredibly distraught.

"MAE! MAE, I'M HERE!", yelled Gregg as he approached. Mae looked up just in time to see Gregg throw himself into her embrace, hugging her with a grip of steel.

"Mae! I'm so glad you're here, dude! I thought I would never see you again!" Gregg was crying again. Mae returned the hug Gregg had given her.

"What about you? Is Angus okay? I haven't seen him here yet, so that means he's alive, right?", asked Mae.

Gregg let go of Mae, "You were the only one, but... how could you do that to us? What about me? What about Bea, huh? You just left us."

"I had to. He was going to kill Angus. I couldn't let him do that to you."

"We could've run. Bombshell opened a portal."

"He can teleport. He could have followed us. Even if I couldn't win, I had to stop him, and I did! Everyone's fine! I'm willing to sacrifice myself if it means you get to live."

Gregg sighed, "Look, I'd rather not argue about this right now. All that matters is you're okay, and I have good news. We might be able to revive you!"

"Really?! How?", asked Mae.

"Karen's a life player. If she's the right class, we could bring you back!"

"That's great!"

"I think Bea's gonna wanna talk about it with you, though."

"What for?"

"She was afraid of bringing you back. She said she didn't want to revive you only for you to die again."
“What?! She can’t just decide that for me!”

“We thought you were dead for real. We didn’t know you’d be here.”

“But she should know me well enough to know I would want to come back. We’ve been together for a year now.”

“Look, you can talk to her about it when she gets here. In the meantime, I think you’ve got some more people who want to hug you right now.” Gregg pointed to Germ, Selmers, and Bombshell, who had all just arrived after being brought there by their alternate selves.

“Mae!”, they all cheered in unison.

Bombshell pulled Mae up with one arm, wrapping the other around her shoulder. “Look at you, defying death again. Way to go!”

“I’m still dead. I just still exist in this dream bubble.”

“You know what I mean.”

“Come on, Selms. You know you want to hug me.”, urged Mae.

“Oh, alright. If you insist.”, said Selmers as she gave Mae a hug.

“You want in, Germ?”, asked Mae.

Germ shrugged and accepted Mae’s hug.

“What is this, your third death? You might be giving Bea a run for her money soon.”

“Shut up, Germ.”, replied Mae playfully.

“Look, there she is now.”, said Germ, pointing to Bea, who was also with Angus.

Bea didn’t say anything before nearly tackling Mae to the ground with how hard she threw herself into her.

“Oh, my god, Mae!”

“Woah, easy there, Beabea.”

“What the hell was that earlier?!”

“What?”

“You killed yourself!”

“What?! No, I didn’t! Eide killed me!”, argued Mae.

“You knew he would kill you, but you fought him anyways!”

“I couldn’t let him kill anyone else. I had to.”

“No, you didn’t! We could’ve run away, but no, you thought it would be a good idea to fight the all-powerful, eldritch god head-on like a dumbass!”

“I’m sorry. I wasn’t thinking, okay? I didn’t want anyone else to die, so I fought him myself. You
can just revive me with Karen, right?”

“It’s not definite, yet.”, said Angus.

“Well, there’s decent good chance, right?”

“I’d say it’s about fifty-fifty right now.”

“See, that’s decent. If she can revive me, just do that.”

Bea sighed, “Two things. First, what if we can’t? What then? I just get to live the rest of my life without you? Second, well… are you sure you want to come back?”

“Of course, I want to come back! Why wouldn’t I?”

“It’s just… Eide killed you so easily. If you come back, you could just die again. I don’t want you to go through that again.”

“Bea, listen to me. I don’t care about any of that. If I can, I’m going to be there to protect you, all of you. You don’t get to make decisions about my life. You’re going to revive me if she’s the right class, do you understand me?”

“But-“

“No buts! Say yes, you’ll revive me.”

Bea saw the fire in Mae’s eyes and knew she wouldn’t be able to argue with her now. “Yes, I’ll revive you.”

“Promise?”

“…Promise.”

“Good.”

“So, what now?”, asked Gregg.

“Party time!”, yelled Mae.

“Awoooooooowooo!”, cheered Gregg

Mae followed, “Awooooooooo!”

“I guess this is happening now.”, said Bea.

“It’s too bad Lori isn’t here to see this.”, lamented Angus.

“We’ll tell her to visit while we’re awake and have Selmers or Bombshell go with Ed until she gets back.”

“That works.”

“Well, you heard the girl. It’s party time.”, said Bombshell as she ushered for the others to follow her to wherever Mae was going.

As it turned out, Mae’s idea was to go to the Party Barn.
“What are we doing here?”, asked Bea.

“Tonight, we’re putting on a show.

Gregg gasped, “Really?”

“Yes. We’re doing this. Everyone else, get settled in because we are going to blow you away!”

“I doubt that.”, said dream Mae.

“Yeah, we’re pretty much you, so I don’t think you’ll be blowing our minds or anything.”, dream Bea agreed. “We’ll still enjoy it though.”

“What are we even playing?”, asked Bea.

“How about Go Get Dead, Angel Face?”, recommended Angus with a cheeky smile on his face.

“You wouldn’t dare.”, said Mae.

“Hm, what were the lyrics again? I think it went like-“

Both Maes shoved their hands over Angus’ mouth before he could say anything.

Angus managed to get their hands off of him long enough to say, “Okay, I’ll stop.”

“How about Die Anywhere Else. That was the first song we played when we got the band back together, remember?”, suggested Gregg.

“I can do that.”, said Mae.

“It’s been awhile since I’ve sung. I hope I’m not too bad.”, worried Angus.

“I’ll play drums as usual.”, said Bea.

“For the last time, Bea, that isn’t drums, that’s computer.”

“Whatever. Let’s just play.”

And so, they played into the night, celebrating Mae’s return, or at least it seemed like that to them. After a few songs, they shared some small talk and had a good time considering everything that had happened that day.

“Whew. That was a good time.”, said Mae.

Gregg gave a big yawn, “Yeah, dude. That was great. It’s too bad I have to wake up again.”

“Well, just make sure Karen levels up as fast as possible so that we can try to bring me back, okay?“

“You got it. Bye.” Gregg left and was soon followed by everyone else except for Bea.

“So, are you going to say goodbye?”, asked Mae.

“Yeah, I guess I have to now.”

“Don’t worry. You’ll see me again tomorrow night, and when Karen god tiers, she’ll revive me, and we’ll be together again. Trust me, I know she’s not going to be someone that steals or destroys
life. She’s not like that.”, Mae assured.

“Yeah. I’m sure she isn’t. Well, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

As Bea turned to leave, Mae hugged her.

“I love you, Beabea.”

“I love you, too, Maeday.”

With that, they both went their separate ways and Bea went home. She fell asleep as soon as she hit her bed.
Chapter 21

When she woke up alone, it was a painful reminder of what might be lost. It was killing her inside not knowing if Karen could bring Mae back. She wished she could do something.

“There’s nothing you can do except wait.”, said Angus.

Bea was startled by Angus’ sudden appearance, but she quickly composed herself, “I know. I just hate not knowing.”

“Sometimes, knowing is more painful than not knowing. Trust me, there are a lot of things I wish I didn’t know. I can see that Cayden is starting to have some trouble with it, especially since his field of knowledge is knowing every possible way all of us can die.”

“That actually sounds pretty horrible.”

“It is.”

“Isn’t there any way to get Karen to god tier faster?”, asked Bea.

“Not that I know of. We can try to push her to fight stronger enemies, but that’s extremely risky. If she dies, we can’t bring anybody back.”, explained Angus.

“Wait, do you remember when Eide killed Lori, then had her stab him before killing her on her sacrificial slab?”

“Yeah, what about it?”

“She god tiered because the act of stabbing Eide, who was a high-level enemy, shot her to the top of her echeladder.”

Angus suddenly realized where she was going with this, “Bea, no. That’s too dangerous.”

“So, you know what I’m getting at, right? Have her attack me until she can god tier. I can heal myself as she does it.”

“Bea, don’t do this. You need to be patient. I care too much about you to let you do this.”

“You can’t tell me what to do, Angus. What are you going to do, kill me if I don’t listen?”

Angus was quiet for a moment.

“That’s what I thought. I’m doing this. We are getting Mae back today.”

“You still need to get Karen to agree.”, said Angus.

“What am I agreeing to?”, said Karen as she got up. She yawned and stretched until Bea grabbed her.

“Come on, we’re going to your planet.”


“I’ll explain when we get there.”
Angus followed Bea and Karen to make sure they would be okay. Once they got to Karen’s house, Bea spoke, “Get out your yo-yos.”

“Okay?” Karen took out her yo-yos like Bea asked. “What now?”

“Attack me with them as hard as you can.”

“What?!”

“Attack me with the yo-yos, and don’t stop until you’ve reached the top of your echeladder.”

“Won’t that kill you?!”, asked Karen.

“I’ll heal myself as you do it.”

“Still, are you sure?”

“Yes. Absolutely.”, assured Bea.

Karen hesitated for a few seconds before throwing a yo-yo at Bea. When it hit, Bea winced at the long gash it made, but it was soon healed.

“Keep going!”, demanded Bea.

“Uh, Okay.”, said Karen, a bit worried for Bea.

She attacked again. Then, another time. Then, again. Bea kept pushing her to attack faster and harder. She was in immense pain, but she pushed forward for Mae’s sake.

Angus had a hard time watching his best friend putting herself through this, but he knew she wouldn’t back down. After what felt like an eternity but was merely one minute, Karen stopped.

“What did you stop for?”, asked Bea.

“I think… I’m there.”

“Already?”, asked Angus.

“Yeah, I’m at the top. Does this mean I can god tier now?”

“I guess.”, said Angus.

“Awesome! Where do I go to get my new powers?”

“I’ll take you there. Just so you know, you have to die to god tier.”

“Really? Wow, this is serious.”

“You’re becoming practically immortal, so it makes sense.”

Angus flew Karen to her quest bed.

“Okay, stand there.”, said Angus as he gestured to the quest bed.

“Alright, I’m on it. So, how are we doing this? Are you just gonna kill me or-“, Karen was cut off as Angus shot her in the back of the head with a magic beam.
Angus and Bea searched the sky for the glowing light that would indicate Karen’s resurrection, and sure enough, it was there. By this point, everyone else was waking up, and the first thing many of them saw was the glowing light on Skaia. Karen had god tiered, but what was she?

When Karen woke up, she felt renewed. Her new body felt great. She could fly!

“Wow…”, was all she could say. She could feel the life flowing through her. It flowed through everything. Even the many corpses on the battlefield still had something left. Seeing a dead prospitan on the ground, she decided to see for herself what her powers were.

A light blue light surrounded the prospitan as she focused her energy into them. Their corpse rose into the air as the blue light wrapped them in a blanket of life. When it dissipated, they stood up, seemingly unharmed. After looking around for a few moments, the prospitan looked up at Karen and bowed before running off to rejoin the fight.

That settled it. Mae was coming back today.

As everyone woke up to this peculiar sight, questions were being asked.

“What was that?”, asked Nick.

“There’s no way.”, said Gregg.

“Where’s Karen?”, asked Cayden.

“Angus and Bea are gone, too.”, pointed out Lori.

“How did she god tier already?”, wondered Bombshell aloud.

“God tier? Who?”, questioned Candy.

“It has to be Karen.”, said Darby.

“I think that’s a new record.”, said Germ.

At that moment, Bea and Angus appeared in the distance. They had returned from Karen’s planet to Cayden’s.

“Hey, Angus, what’s going on?”, asked Gregg.

“Bea played the system. Karen’s a god tier now.”

“How did she play the system exactly?”

“I’m a high-level player. By attacking me, Karen climbed her echeladder extremely fast. It was just like what happened with Lori and Eide.”, answered Bea.

“Are you sure that’s okay? What if we’re messing with the timeline too much?”, questioned Selmers.

“It’s too late now. Let’s just hope that was what was destined to happen.”, replied Angus.

“I’m gonna go grab her. Be right back.”, said Bombshell as she sped off toward Skaia with her space powers.

Karen, meanwhile, was flying toward her own planet, but Bombshell managed to catch her before
“She got too far.”

“Bombshell? What are you doing here?”, asked Karen.

“I came here to bring you to Cayden’s. Everyone’s there waiting for you. Come on.” Bombshell opened a portal back to Cayden’s, and Karen went through. When the portal opened, everyone looked to it, and when Karen stepped through, Angus smiled.

“So, what is she? Tell me.”, pleaded Bea to Angus.

“Angus took a good look at Karen’s costume. It looked just like Selmers’, except it was grey with a green life symbol at the center.

“She’s a maid. We can bring Mae back.”

A collective cheer was heard from everyone as Angus delivered the good news.

“Well, what are we waiting for? Let’s go get Mae back!”, urged Gregg as he ran to where they had buried Mae. Gregg quickly blew all of the dirt off of Mae, wincing slightly as he was forced to look at her still lifeless body.

Karen stood over the grave. Everyone awaited in silent anticipation for Karen to work her magic. Taking a deep breath, Karen surrounded Mae in the blue light. Her body rose like that of the prospitan’s. After a few seconds, the light faded. Mae floated back down to the ground and opened her eyes.

Mae looked around for a moment confused. Her friends stared expectantly. They were waiting for her to say something.

“Um, that was quick.”

Everyone sighed. So much for a grand entrance.

“Ha ha, it’s good to have you back, Mae.”, said Gregg.

Bea hugged Mae.

“Seriously, didn’t I just see you like half an hour ago? How am I back already?”, asked Mae.

“Karen god tiered.”, answered Bea.

“Well, yeah. That was pretty obvious, but how did she god tier already?”

“Well… you know how Lori god tiered after she attacked Eide?”

“Yeah. Did Eide just let Karen attack her?”

“No. She attacked me. I told her to.”

Mae was stunned for a moment, “Wow. You really didn’t need to do that for me. I could’ve waited. Are you okay?”

“I’m fine now, but those yo-yos hurt like a bitch.”

“Getting cut with sharp objects does tend to hurt.”, said Angus.
“Well, at least we got Mae back.”

“Mae’s Back!”, exclaimed Gregg as he began to flap his arms excitedly.

Mae threw her arms into the air, “I’m back!”

“So, now that she’s back, should we get going on the gates again?”, asked Candy.

“Wait. Things have changed. After seeing Eide, we can’t keep going at the same pace we’ve been going. One gate per day isn’t going to cut it, not if we want to keep everyone alive.”, said Cayden.

“I agree, but gates take a while, especially when we’re letting you all kill everything.”, argued Mae.

“That’s why you’re going to start clearing them for us.”, replied Cayden.

“But we need you to be god tier by the end.”, said Angus.

“That’s the easy part. We have two healers now. We’re all going to do what Karen did. It’s the only way to make sure no one else dies. Once Eide sees that Mae’s alive, he’ll probably kill Karen. I’m not letting that happen.”

“There’s still the matter of weapons. You’ll all need better gear if we’re going to stand a chance.”

“You were all on that meteor for a year. I know you have enough grist to build us some weapons. You also know how to make high-end weapons. I haven’t seen Gregg’s daggers in action yet, but I’ll bet they’re powerful, at least judging by the look of them.”

For demonstration, Gregg took out his Tempest Blades, stole some breath from his surroundings, threw a rock into the air, and sliced through it with an invisible blade of air with deadly precision.

“Hm, they’re powered by your aspect, too.”, commented Cayden.

“That’s only because we alchemized them with our god tier outfits. They’re incredibly expensive. We couldn’t make them until the end of the game. You’ll need your denizen’s grist to build them. We would recommend not building them with your already upgraded weapons. Sure, they would be more powerful, but the amount of grist they would cost might not leave you with enough to pump into Skaia at the end of the game.”, explained Angus.

“That makes sense. So, how should we proceed?”

“We might want to run the plan past John first.”

“He hasn’t talked to us in a while. I wonder what he’s been doing?”, said Candy.

“Let’s check.” Mae pulled out her phone and messaged the group chat.

MB: John? Are you there?

GT: Omg, I’m so sorry. I’ve been busy for like the past day. There was an incident in Can Town, and I was needed to calm everything down.

MB: It’s fine. A lot’s happened, though.

GT: I’m looking back at it now. Geez, that’s pretty rough. How exactly are you talking to me if you just died?
MB: Just fast forward a bit.

GT: Um, this could be bad.

MB: What happened?

GT: Speaking from experience, trying to rush the game, especially the god tiering, usually doesn’t end well.

BS: It’s already done, so we’ll just have to deal with the consequences.

GT: I guess it might be necessary. Eide’s really powerful now.

CD: So, did you listen to my plan?

GT: Yes, and I’m a bit worried about it. Having Karen god tier early is probably already pushing the limits of what’s not going to get you killed.

CD: If we wait too long, we’ll all die anyways.

GT: I mean, I can’t really stop you, so it’s up to you. I’m only here to give you advice.

Angus spoke up to the group, “Does anyone have any objections about Cayden’s plan?” There was no response. “I guess we’re all in agreement. We’ve got a plan.”

“So, should we get started?”, asked Mae.

“Alright. We need two pairs of pre and post-scratch dancestors.”, commanded Angus.

Candy stepped forward, and so did Cayden. Mae and Gregg followed.

“Mae, stay back. There’s still a risk involved with this. We can’t bring you back again if Candy accidentally killed you. I’ll take your place, since Karen didn’t attack me.”, said Angus.

Mae was hesitant for a moment, but she ultimately stepped back.

“Karen, heal Gregg. Bea, heal me. Are you two ready?”

Candy and Cayden both nodded.

“You good, bug?”, asked Angus.

“Yeah. How about you, cap’n?”

“I’m ready. Three, two, one, go.”

Gregg and Angus braced themselves for the pain. Angus held up an arm to take the force of Candy’s swing. Her axe cut deep into his arm. He winced, groaning a bit. Cayden shot Gregg multiple times, making sure not to accidentally shoot him anywhere that would kill him instantly. Every bullet seemed to take the breath out of Gregg. Karen focused her life energy into Gregg, and Bea focused her healing into Angus.

The onslaught was brutal to watch. Everyone worriedly awaited their turn to be in their place. Eventually, Candy and Cayden stopped. Gregg and Angus were breathing heavily, tears absently streaming from their eyes.
“Is it over?”, asked Gregg.

“Yes. I’m ready.”, replied Candy.

“Same here.”, added Cayden

“Holy shit. That hurt so bad. I feel like I should’ve gone into shock like, five freakin’ times, but Karen wouldn’t let me.”

“Trust me, feeling your organs almost spill out because you just let someone axe you in the abdomen isn’t much better.”, said Angus.

“Come on, get the next group up here. We don’t have much time. Mae and Gregg, take Candy and me to our god tier beds, and show us what to do. I want everyone else to do the same with their dancestors while we’re gone. We’ll all meet back here when we’re done.”, ordered Cayden.

“Who’s next?”, asked Angus as those four left.

Mae took Candy to her planet and searched for the mountain with the quest bed on it. It didn’t take long to spot it, and it took even less time to fly to it once it was in sight.

“So, how exactly does this work?”, asked Candy.

“You have to die on this quest bed.”

“Well, that sucks.”

“The worst part is that both of our weapons are going to be hard to kill you painlessly with.”

Candy sighed, “Look, I trust you. This needs to happen, so I’ll just let you kill me as fast as you possibly can.”

“Okay, I’ll see if I can knock you out first. First, I’ll steal your rage.” Mae took the rage from Candy and struck her in the back of the head with her bat. Luckily, she was knocked unconscious.

Mae let out a sigh of relief and begun stealing all the rage she could from her surroundings.

Mae closed her eyes, so she wouldn’t be forced to see what was probably going to leave a large mess on her clothes. Fortunately, the god tier clothes seemed to have self-cleaning properties.

Finally, she brought the bat down on Candy’s head, and a splat was heard. She felt blood land on her.

Once Candy’s body began to glow, Mae opened her eyes. The blood on her was already going away, and all that was left was a pool of blood on the ground along with Candy’s stuff. After collecting her stuff, Mae began the trip back to Cayden’s. On her way back, she saw lights appear on Skaia in pairs of two. By the time Cayden’s house was in view, five lights had appeared.

Finally, Mae reached Cayden’s house. The only people there were Gregg, Angus, Selmers, Bea, and Karen.

“Is everyone done already?”, asked Mae.

“Yes.”, answered Angus, “They’ve all god tiered, too. All of the lights on Skaia went off.”

“Why isn’t Bea with Nick?”

“We got lucky. His quest bed was within sight of the house.”, answered Bea.
“So, now we just go make some weapons and rush through the gates?”

“Yes. I think I have a way to get this to go even faster, too.”

“That would be me.”, said Selmers, “When we start the gates, I’ll go with one group, slow down time for them through a gate, and then, I’ll move to the next person and do the same in a cycle until we’re done. Bombshell will be with me to teleport me between planets.”

“Angus, you so smart.”, complimented Mae.

“Why, thank you. I am pretty smart, aren’t I?”, replied Angus, indulging in a bit of gloating.

“Yeah! That’s why you’re my cap’n!”’, said Gregg with a huge grin.

“You wanna know why you’re my bug?”, asked Angus.

“Why?”

“Because you’re so adorable when you smile like that.”

Gregg began to blush, “Aww, thanks. Your smile is cute, too.”

Mae playfully skipped over to Bea, “Beabea, do you think my smile is adorable?” She gave the biggest smile she could muster, which ended up just making her look silly. It got Bea to laugh, though.

“Yeah, I guess it is.”

“Man, I wish I could get you to laugh more. That smile was pretty adorable if you ask me.”

Bea went back to her usual, superficial smile, “Oh, really? I guess you’ll have to try harder to get me to laugh then.”

Bombshell appeared with everyone who had god tiered in tow. It didn’t take much longer for Everyone else to return as well.

“We’re back.”, greeted Bombshell.

Floating behind her were the rest of the god tiers. Cayden, like Angus suspected, was a mage of doom. Candy was a knight of hope like Eine had said. Nick was a prince of breath. Darby was a seer of void. Edward was an heir of light.

“Well, that’s everyone. Should we get started?”, asked Mae.

“Yes. Yes, we should.”, replied Cayden.

Angus explained the plan with Selmers.

“Okay, that’s smart. We might actually be able to pull this off.”, said Cayden with a surprising amount of hope despite being a mage of doom.

“It’s great that we’re going to be able to ‘beat’ the game and all, but what about Eide and Eine?”, asked Candy.

“Yeah, and what about Jack? Him and Eine both have rings.”, added Edward.
“Eide and Eine are easy. We just kill Jack and strip Eine of his ring. He’ll be powerless.”, said Angus.

“That still leaves Eide.”, said Bea, “We can’t beat him by just throwing ourselves at him.”

“What if I tried to set off his sprite by overflowing it with heart?”, suggested Lori.

“That might have worked before the scratch, but now that he has Skaia, it’s impossible. Before he killed Mae, I’m sure we all noticed the light that he used on Mae. That was hope magic, and as a result, Mae’s rage was destroyed.”, explained Angus.

“What does that have to do with it?”, questioned Lori.

Angus continued, “He can create any aspect, because Skaia has unlimited creative potential. The reason the hope cancelled out the rage has to do with what I believe is aspect antithesis theory. This theory works on the premise that every aspect has an antithesis or opposite. They cancel each other out. The theory has some loose ends, but that doesn’t matter to Eide, because he could force it to be true with his power. All Eide would need to do to cancel out your heart is create mind, its antithesis.”

“So, what do we do then? That was really our only plan.”, asked Mae.

“I could try forcing Eide from the sprite directly. It would be harder, but he can’t cancel out me moving his spirit, right?”, suggested Lori.

“Y’know, that might actually work. If we rip Eide from the sprite, we can prototype it with something else that’s harmless. He won’t have any power except for what the black goat gives him, which we can easily beat.”, said Angus.

“We’ll need to distract him while she does it.”, pointed out Cayden.

“I did sort of well when I fought him. I bet if he’s having his soul sucked out of him-“., started Mae

“No. You’re the last person we should be sending. You can’t come back again.”, argued Bea, and as much Mae hated to admit it, she was right.

“How about me?”, offered Bombshell, “I have what are arguably the most powerful abilities besides Lori. I could take him on long enough for Lori to get the job done.”

“The rest of us can provide support from the back and swap in if needed.”, added Angus.

“Sounds like a plan. Now, we should get going so we have time to gather everyone before he comes back.”, urged Cayden.

Everyone agreed and split off into groups with their dancestors. Bombshell and Selmers travelled with Mae and Candy first, since they were already at Cayden’s planet to complete the second gate.

“What do you mean they’re gone?!”, yelled Eine after a guard came to inform him that Cayden, Edward, and Darby weren’t in their cells.

“They can’t have gone far. Find them! Scour this entire planet if you have to!”, ordered Eine. The soldier nodded furiously in fear before running off to carry out the orders.

“Unbelievable.”, muttered Eine to himself. Jack sat there contemplating how the prisoners had escaped. None of the guards had noticed anything except for bloodstains in each of the cells. What
had happened?

“I’ll tell you what happened.”, came a new voice in the royal chambers.

Eine looked at him, confused, “Um, why are you wearing the same mask as me? Who are you?”

“Ah, allow me to introduce myself. I am your dancestor, Eide.” Eide extended his hand to Eine.

Eine accepted and shook Eide’s hand, “I have one, too?”

“Yes. I’m here to help you. I assume you want Candy and the others dead?”

“Yes, more than anything, but I want it to be painful. I can’t just kill them. They need to suffer.”

“And I feel the same way. Say, how about we make a deal? We can even get Jackie-boy over there in on it, too.”

Eine gave a devilish grin, “Go on.”

“First, I’ll tell you what happened to your prisoners. My session’s players cheated the system and got everyone to god tier early. They no longer have dream selves.”

“Those sons of bitches. Can I still kill them? Will the rings be enough?”, asked Eine.

“No. Even if you wore both, their dancestors would be quick to kill you.”

“Well, how did you not die? You don’t have any rings.”

“I have the unlimited power of Skaia. I don’t need rings.”, boasted Eide.

“Can I get this power?”

“I doubt they’re stupid enough to try and create the new universe again before killing us. I can, however, give you a massive amount of power myself. It won’t be unlimited like mine, but it might as well be, and like I said, Jack can have in on this, too, if he wants.”

“I like where you’re going with this.”, said Eine.

Jack seemed intrigued by this proposal as well.

“Join me, and we will make them pay!”

It was now time for everyone to journey through the gates. Before leaving, everyone had crafted new weapons as well, except for Darby, who had been given all of the explosives she would ever need by Germ.

Candy’s axe and shield were now fused with a cross, adorning them with the holy symbol. Now, Candy was really looking like a holy warrior.

Cayden combined his pistol with a rechargeable battery and a camera lens. The rechargeable battery allowed for infinite ammunition, and the lens gave it a scope for long distance firing.

Karen alchemized her yo-yos with a magnet, which surprisingly, didn’t make them attracted to metal. It seemed that they were actually attracted to monsters. This made hitting things at long range incredibly easy.
Edward added nails to his rocket gloves, giving them spikes in the front. He did this with his boots as well. With these, his martial arts would be brutal.

Nick kept his Fear No Anvil, for it was more powerful than anything he could create with what he had.

The world almost seemed to know of the group’s plight, because as everyone went through the gates, the only challenges that were appearing seemed to be bosses. The personal growth aspect of the game seemed to be stripped entirely.

Luckily for everyone, because Eide had been the second prototyping for all of the sprites he went into, none of the enemies gained his power.

With everyone’s god tier powers, powering through the gates was almost a joke. In the end, completing all five before the denizens only took a few minutes in real time. Slowing the entire universe’s time for as long as Selmers had to that extent was incredibly difficult. For her as well as Bombshell, who was with her the entire time, the experience was over 24 hours long with no sleep. If it weren’t for the occasional trip to Karen for some extra energy, she may have collapsed in the middle of it all.

Overall, things were going great for the group’s speedrun of SBRUB. After everyone’s sixth gates were completed, it was time for everyone to face their denizens.

“Guys, I think I need to sit this one out. I’m exhausted. I’m going to lay here and sleep for a few hours. I should be ready by the time Eide gets here. We still have a few hours I think before Eide returns again.”, said Selmers.

“Me, too. I was with you the entire time. Staying awake for over twenty-four hours while fighting monsters is not doing wonders for my body right now.”, said Bombshell.

“That’s fine. We may need you at your best for the final fight.”, replied Angus.

“Wow. This is really it, huh? No more second chances. No more scratches. It’ll all be over today.”, marveled Mae.

“Yep! Now, I know I say this every time, but let’s kick Eide’s ass!”, cheered Gregg.

“Slow down, Gregg. We still need to fight the denizens.”, said Angus.

“Yeah, but they’ll be easy. Not only are there two of us per denizen, but we have a whole year’s worth of training behind us.”, replied Gregg, motioning to everyone from before the scratch.

“I guess you’re right. Is everyone ready?”, asked Angus.

Everyone nodded.

“Alright, let’s go.”

Everyone split off into the gates that would bring them back to their respective planets. Cayden was the only one to stay, since they were already at his house.

“Let’s go, man!”, urged Gregg as he flew to Cayden’s seventh gate.

“Coming!” Cayden flew to catch up with Gregg, who had already reached the gate and was waiting next to it.
“How are you so fast?”, asked Cayden.

“I just use my crazy wind powers to fly really fast. Bombshell’s the only one who could beat me.”

“Nice. So, what should I expect?”

“Oh, just a giant snake monster with doom powers.”, answered Gregg.

“Why a giant snake?”

Gregg shrugged, “Don’t ask me. This game is weird sometimes.”

“How hard do you think it’ll be?”

“Not too hard. You’ve got me with you, after all.”

“If you say so.”, replied Cayden nervously. The idea of a giant monster with doom powers still seemed incredibly dangerous, but Gregg didn’t seem too worried about it.

“Let’s go!” Gregg pulled Cayden through the portal with him.

The portal took them to the front of a giant dome. There was a set of doors right next to where Cayden and Gregg had spawned.

“I guess we go in here.”, said Gregg.

“Wait.”, warned Cayden just as Gregg was about to open the door, “There’s a large concentration of doom magic in there. I think the denizen might be just beyond that door.”

“So? I told you this is going to be easy. Let’s just go.” Ignoring Cayden’s warning, Gregg opened the door. Just as Cayden had predicted, the denizen laid sleeping inside.

“Come on. Let’s ambush it.”, whispered Gregg. He stepped in and noticeably recoiled at something upon entering.

“What the hell is this? Everything feels wrong.”

“What? What is it?”, asked Cayden as he stepped in. Suddenly, there was what felt like a huge weight on his soul.

“This is almost like that smokey stuff that Typhus had, but it’s different.”, said Gregg.

“What is this place?”, wondered Cayden. He looked up. Everything was black, yet they could see the dormant denizen fine. Looking around, everything was pitch black except for him, Gregg, and the denizen. The dull blackish-green color of his god tier costume almost blended in with the surroundings.

“Is this what doom feels like?” Cayden considered this. This feeling, it may have been the weight of fate, the feeling that everything that had happened had been scripted, and that everything yet to come was already planned. The choices made were pre-determined for this timeline.

“Screw it! Whatever this is, it doesn’t matter. All that matters is killing them.” Gregg reached out in an attempt to steal some breath, but he got nothing.

“What? Why can’t I find any breath?”
“There is no freedom here. There’s only fate. There’s no breath to steal.,” explained Cayden.

“Shit. This might be harder than I thought. We can still ambush him, though.” At that, the ground rumbled as the denizen lifted its head up off of the ground.

“Shit. Guess we’re not doing that anymore.”

Hello, Cayden. I see you have strayed from the path of fate.

“What do you mean?”, asked Cayden.

“What’s it saying?”, asked Gregg.

You should not be here, yet here you are. I, Moros, must return this timeline on its set path, starting with killing you.

“No, I won’t let you!” Cayden pulled out his handgun and began shooting.

“What did it say? I can’t understand it.”, questioned Gregg.

“That doesn’t matter, just kill it!”, replied Cayden as he dodged a tail swipe from Moros.

“Got it!”, said Gregg, drawing his knives.

Cayden dodged wildly about the room, avoiding more tail swipes and some eye lasers. Gregg, however, got hit multiple times. He wasn’t used to fighting and dodging without his breath.

At one point, Moros slammed Gregg into the ground with his tail. He struggled to crawl back to his feet, but Moros had other plans. It charged something that wasn’t visible to Gregg or Cayden, but Cayden felt it. When the denizen released it at Gregg, Cayden rushed to pull him out of the way. He barely managed to tackle Gregg to the side. Whatever Moros had fired, it had missed.

“Oh, what did you do that for?”, asked Gregg.

“You almost died. He almost killed you like Mae.”

“What?! Geez dude, thanks for saving me.”

“No problem, but I’m not getting anywhere. This pistol isn’t enough to do anything to him, and my mage powers aren’t exactly useful for killing him.”

“I have an idea. I’m gonna do what Mae did. I’ll steal my own breath.”

“What? But you can’t even get close to that thing! I doubt you have enough breath in you to kill from this far, either.”, argued Cayden.

“I know.“, said Gregg. He then proceeded to do it anyways, but he gave it to Cayden instead of himself. “That’s why I’m giving it to you. Go get ‘em, dude!”

Cayden was able to notice the incoming tail swipe just in time to grab Gregg and dodge out of the way by using a small amount of breath to propel himself. He set Gregg upright, “Stay here. Don’t get too close.”

“I won’t. Now, go.”

Cayden ran around, shooting Moros constantly. He needed to get close in order to use the breath
Gregg had given him to the fullest extent. As Cayden circled Moros, it became increasingly more difficult to dodge its attacks. He was forced to expend small amounts of breath to evade it all. He knew he couldn’t use too much, or it wouldn’t do anything to the denizen when he reached it.

Once Cayden began getting too close, Moros became desperate. It began firing more of the invisible projectiles at Cayden. They weren’t actually invisible, but they were completely black, so they blended in with the surroundings.

Cayden dodged ball after ball, eventually getting right in Moros’ face. In that moment, he thrust his hand forward, forcing all of the breath out into Moros. It turned out that this, combined with all of the chip damage from Cayden’s bullets, was enough to fell the denizen, creating a satisfying explosion of grist.

When Cayden looked back at Gregg, he was giving him a weak thumbs up. The gate had opened behind Gregg. With a relieved sigh, Cayden returned to Gregg, and they went through the portal.

With one denizen fight down, there were still five left, and Cayden’s wasn’t as easy as Gregg thought it would be. Would the others be the same way?
Chapter 22

Candy’s seventh gate landed her and Mae outside of a huge church. This was larger than any of the sanctuaries or churches they had been to previously. There were seven lanterns across the front of the building, and six of them had gone out. This was most likely due to everyone else’s journey through Candy’s planet, where they all killed bosses similar to the one Candy had faced.

When Candy opened the door to the gigantic church, she was met with the gaze of Abraxas, the denizen of hope.

*You have renounced your faith in the being you know as god, so tell me, who do you have faith in now?*

Candy breathed in deep, “I have faith in myself, my friends, and my family! We make the change we want to see in the world, not some ‘god’!”

*But you are only a mere mortal. You may have gained immortality, but you can still die. How can you ever hope to face god?*

“How about I show you?” Candy infused her axe and shield with hope. Mae stole rage from around her as well. When she did this, Abraxas surrounded her in a white light, and it was gone.

“Damn it. It knows.”, growled Mae.

“Here, take this.”, said Candy as she gave Mae an aura of hope.

“Huh. This feels different. I kinda like it.”

With that, Candy charged in first, only to be intercepted by a hope blast, which she blocked with her shield, but it almost knocked her back into the wall. The sheer force of it caused Candy to begin to doubt herself.

“Are you okay?” , asked Mae.

“Yeah, I’m fine. That was so powerful, though. I don’t know if we can do this.” Mae felt her hope aura weaken. Candy’s weakened as well.

“What happened?” , wondered Mae.

*Have I broken your resolve already? How much more pathetic could you be?*

Candy said nothing in response. Abraxas shot another beam of light at Candy. Candy rose her shield to block it again, but this time, she felt it in her arm, a blunt pain, and it wasn’t light, either. She grimaced at the pain. It was breaking through her defenses. She wouldn’t last much longer.

Mae, seeing what was happening, charged at Abraxas herself. She felt her hope weaken once again just in time to take a full-on tail swipe, sending her flying into a wall.

Candy was now backed up against a wall. She was trapped. Abraxas charged up a final light cannon to finish Candy off.

“Candy, do something! You control your life, remember? Now, I know this is going to be cliché as hell, but you have to believe in yourself!”, yelled Mae as she was still struggling to get up after being thrown into a wall.
Abraxas fired the massive beam, and Candy stood her ground. She closed her eyes and believed, truly believed, that she would be okay, and it worked. She opened her eyes to find that her hope was stronger than ever. Somehow, Mae’s really cliché encouragement sparked something in her.

Really? That’s what restores your hope?

Candy said nothing to this and flew at Abraxas. She believed that she would be okay, and she was. Her shield’s light extended itself out to block any incoming attacks. Then, she believed in the power of her attack, and that it would be able to inflict a mortal wound. She was right. Feeling the deep incision in their neck, Abraxas roared furiously.

Mae stood and ran at the denizen from behind. Her hope aura was now gigantic, and it only grew stronger as Candy believed more and more in their ability to win.

“Candy, let’s go!”, called Mae as she flew full speed at the back of Abraxas’ head. Candy nodded, pumping all of her hope into her weapon. The light formed into a weapon many times larger than its original form. Dropping the shield, Candy gripped the axe with both hands. She flew at Abraxas from behind.

Abraxas couldn’t recover in time to avoid what happened next. Mae plunged her back into the back of its head, sending they forward with surprising speed for their size. Candy then sent her axe of light through Abraxas entirely, decapitating them before they exploded entirely. Mae was almost hit by the axe as it went through.

“Geez, be careful with that thing!”

“Oh, sorry!”, Candy apologized as she allowed the light to disperse.

“Holy shit, that was awesome!”, exclaimed Mae.

“Really?”

“Uh, yeah! You just decapitated a denizen!”

“I should probably grab my shield.” Candy looked down at it. The exit gate opened next to it.

“I hope everyone else is okay.”, said Candy.

“Trust me, they’ll be fine.”

Karen was the opposite of fine. Her denizen, Hemera, the denizen of life, resided in a large greenhouse. Once Karen and Angus had entered, Hemera immediately attacked. Life didn’t pull any punches.

Due to having power over the domain of life, Hemera didn’t have any offensive capabilities, so it mainly attacked with its tail. Karen was knocked aside by the first strike. She healed herself, but Hemera attacked again. Then, again. Again. Karen wasn’t given enough time to heal and start a counterattack between blows, so she had to focus on healing herself.

Angus attacked with beams of magic. There was a problem, though. Hemera was able to heal itself. Even Angus couldn’t out-damage it. He decided to try out a nifty feature of his wands. Unlike his other wands, Angus had control of the magic once it left the wand. That was how he created a barrier back on Karen’s planet.

Angus began building up a massive ball of energy, hoping to finish Hemera in one blow. However,
Hemera saw this and focused her attack on Angus. Throwing what he had at the denizen, Angus couldn’t dodge in time, and he was thrown through one of the windows of the greenhouse by Hemera’s tail.

The ball of energy landed, causing a huge blow, but Hemera was healing it rapidly. Karen, seeing this, quickly threw her yo-yos at her. They both found their mark, but they barely put a dent in Hemera. Wrapping the yo-yos around Hemera’s neck, she pulled, attempting to choke her.

Karen felt Hemera pull on the strings. This would be a repeat of the ogre fight if she let her pull her off her feet. Karen strained as hard as she could to keep herself locked down, but she could feel herself slipping.

Finally, Karen felt herself lift off of the ground. She couldn’t let this happen again. When Hemera attempted to slam her into the ground, Karen pulled the strings to the side, causing her to swing in a wide arc. She could barely feel her feet brush the ground. She repeated this a few times. One of the yo-yos became unwrapped, while the other coiled tighter around Hemera, bringing her closer with each swing.

Eventually, Karen found herself in Hemera’s face. Karen cockily waved and smiled at Hemera.

You can’t win. Not with those puny toys.

“Maybe not, but he can. Go, Angus!” Karen called. Angus had been waiting outside, charging another ball, this time for much longer. It was enormous, and when Angus threw it, it melted a massive hole in the glass.

Karen jumped away from Hemera, sadly leaving one of her yo-yos behind as Angus’ orb crashed into Hemera. She cried out, but only for a moment, for she exploded into grist not a moment later.

“Nice!”, cheered Karen. Angus stood outside, breathing heavily. He was incredibly grateful to not have asthma anymore, or this may have been impossible.

Angus flew over to Karen, “Thanks for keeping it busy.”

“Eh, it was nothing.”, said Karen.

“It won’t be long now. Let’s go get ready.” Angus and Karen stepped through the exit gate after collecting the grist.

Upon entering Nick’s gate, Bea and he were once again met with a raging storm. The storm never seemed to be too bad at the house, but here, it threatened to throw them off of their feet if they weren’t careful.

Nick, seeing this, created a pocket of space where the wind couldn’t reach them. In front of them, there stood a large stone building. There was a single door and no windows or decorations to speak of. The only noticeable thing was the breath symbol on the door.

When Nick went to open the door, it wouldn’t budge. He pushed, and Bea tried to help, too, but it wouldn’t move. That’s when Nick realized the breath symbol didn’t have a break in it where the doors should have split.

“Should we try to break it open?”, asked Bea.

“No, wait. I might have an idea.” With this, Nick placed his hands on the door and forced some breath into it, and to his surprise, it accepted it. The symbol began to glow blue. Then, Nick
destroyed it at the split in the door. The seal was broken, and the doors opened with ease.

“Okay, that works, too.”, said Bea.

“Yeah. Are you ready to see what’s inside?”

“I’m ready if you are.”

“Let’s go then.” Nick entered first with his Fear No Anvil drawn. Bea had her knives at the ready. Somehow, the inside of the building was just as windy as the outside, and it was blowing up dust, making it difficult to see.

“What the hell?”, grumbled Bea.

“How is it windy indoors?”, wondered Nick.

“I don’t know. Maybe, they have some giant-ass fans in here somewhere.”, replied Bea sarcastically.

“Bea, what does a denizen look like?”, asked Nick.

“They’re really big snake monsters.”

“What about when they’re sleeping?”

“Um, like a sleeping snake monster? Why are you asking?”

“Now, correct me if I’m wrong, but doesn’t that thing over there sort of look like a sleeping snake monster, or is it just a hill or something?” Nick pointed to the very hazy outline of something in front of them. Bea had to strain her eyes to see it. It was huge.

“Yeah, that’s totally a denizen.”, said Bea.

“What? It’s huge! How are we supposed to fight that thing!”, questioned Nick just a bit too loudly.

“Nick, shut up!”, whispered Bea harshly.

The rumbling of the ground instantly filled Nick with regret. The wind stopped, and the dust began to settle, revealing the form of Typhoeus, the same denizen that Gregg fought.

Welcome. You have decided to forsake the fabric this game was built on. Are you ready to face the consequences?

“I don’t know. All I know was that there was no other way.”, replied Nick.

You still do not understand. You are not ready.

“What don’t I understand?”

You do not understand breath.

“Breath? But I can use my powers just fine. Tell me what I need to understand.”, pleaded Nick.

I do not need to tell you. Either you will learn what it means to be one who destroys breath, or you will die here.

The wind came back with a vengeance. Nick tried to keep it away from him and Bea, but it was too
powerful. Slowly, the bubble he had made began shrinking.

“How are we supposed to fight him in this?”, asked Bea.

“I don’t know, but we have to find a way.”

Typheus attacked with his tail. Nick forced it back with wind, but the force of the blow caused a drastic decrease in the bubble’s size.

“Any bright ideas?”, questioned Bea.

“Grab onto my shoulders.”, demanded Nick.

“What?”

“Just do it.”

Bea gave in and grabbed onto Nick. Nick then flew into the air, keeping the bubble around him as best he could. He took out his hammer and attempted to swing at Typheus’ face, but he was blown back just before he reached him.

That is not enough. Do not work against my powers, break them. Use them to break me.

The space in which Nick and Bea could move was rapidly closing in on them. They were running out of options.

“Use them to break him?”, mumbled Nick to himself as he wondered how to interpret it. Suddenly, he had an idea.

“Bea, I’m going to leave you. I need you to trust me.”

“What?! I can’t survive out there!”

“Please, I have an idea. I won’t let him kill you. Just try to stand your ground as long as you can.” Nick flew into the air, wrapping the wind-free pocket around himself. Bea found herself on all fours in order to keep herself from flying into the wall.

Nick flew at Typheus again, and like last time, Typheus sent a gust of wind to keep him back, but Nick anticipated this. At the last second, he pushed himself to the side with a gust of wind and dropped the bubble. Typheus’ wind blew Nick at him with immense speed. Nick used this speed to smash him in the head with the Fear No Anvil with all his might.

Typheus was frozen in time, and the wind stopped. Bea shakily stood and looked at Nick, who wasn’t done yet. While Typheus was still frozen, he surrounded him in a massive ball of wind, which he surrounded in a barrier that would prevent any wind from escaping, including Typheus’. He had done it. He had destroyed the rules that Typheus had laid down and used them to destroy him.

Maybe you aren’t so hopeless after all.

With no way to escape Nick’s breath field, Typheus sat still and allowed himself to be defeated. Nick’s cue to stop came when grist started being flung around out of the orb.

“Holy shit.”, said Nick between breaths.

“Huh, I guess he just wanted you to unlock your full potential or something.”
“Yeah. This whole aspect thing is really complicated.”

“Yeah, it was weird for us, too. A lot of learning to control your aspect is understanding what it means to you. What does breath mean to you?”, asked Bea.

“I’m not sure. If we’re talking about breath in the freedom sense, I guess I would say that it’s been taken from me. Back in Possum Springs, I didn’t have to worry about anything. I knew my skills, and there was never anything in my everyday life I couldn’t handle. Now, though, I’m here, and I don’t know anything about how this world works. I’m trapped here.”

“Are you sure about that? You seemed to understand how to win pretty fast back there. You took his advantage and used it against him. If you destroy breath, then you should be destroying the enemy’s, not yours.”

Nick thought this over for a moment, “Wait. That’s what he meant.”

“What? Did he say something to you? I couldn’t hear over the wind.”, questioned Bea.

“He told me to use his own power to break him, so I thought of how to take the wind and use it to win.”

“I was right? I was kind of just trying to pull some philosophical breath talk out of my ass there.”

“Well, you were right. Can we go now? I need some rest before we have to fight Eide.”

“Yeah, let’s go. The exit portal’s right over there.” Bea pointed to the portal, which was still partially hidden by the dust clouds from Typhesus’ wind. The two walked through the portal together.

Darby’s encounter with her denizen was more difficult than Germ had anticipated. When he had fought Nyx, she was easy, but this time was different. When they entered the gate, they appeared in front of a giant hole covered in fog. Germ sent the fog to the void, and a spiraling staircase was revealed with torches placed on the wall at regular intervals.

Germ and Darby wet down until the stairs stopped. At the bottom, there was a set of doors. Germ opened the door, revealing a giant room which housed Nyx, the denizen of void. She was asleep, and this gave Germ and Darby an opportunity.

“Alright, this is going to be easy. Just throw bombs at her until she dies. Honestly, for a final boss, Nyx isn’t threatening at all.”, assured Germ.

As soon as he said that, the lights all went out.

“Guess I shouldn’t have opened my mouth, huh?”

“You think?”, replied Darby passive-aggressively. “How are we supposed to hit her if we can’t see?”

“Don’t worry, I got this.” With that, Darby was suddenly able to see again, but Nyx was nowhere to be found.

“What just happened?”, asked Darby.

“I’m a bard of void. I just destroyed the lack of light, so now, there’s light.”

“Oh, that makes sense. What now, though? We can’t see Nyx. How could she hide in a giant
empty room with no exits?"

At that moment, Germ was sent flying by an invisible force, and the lights went out again.

“Germ? Are you okay?”

“I think my ribs are broken.”, replied Germ.

“What’s going on? I didn’t see anything hit you?”

“I think it was Nyx. I’m pretty sure you can use void powers to make yourself invisible if you’re the right class.”, explained Germ.

“Can you do that?”, asked Darby.

“I’d probably end up killing myself with the void. Then again, suicide isn’t heroic or evil, is it? I mean, I’m not trying it either way, but it’s still an interesting question.”

“Maybe, we should pay attention to the fight.”

“Yeah, you’re right. I actually have an idea.”

“What is it?”

“Let’s use our fraymotif.”

“Ohhh, I see.” Germ and Darby activated Nihility Duet, and the purpose immediately became clear. Darby could sense where Nyx’s void powers were more concentrated, and then, they would know her position, and Germ could destroy her invisibility.

“There!”, called Darby, and Germ brought the light back around Nyx while destroying her invisibility.

“Darby, attack her!”, commanded Germ.

Darby began throwing bombs at Nyx rapidly, and with Germ negating her void powers, she couldn’t fight back. She was being riddled with explosions.

“Throw the null bombs! I can’t exactly avoid her if she attacks me with broken ribs.”

Darby began using up their stash of null bombs. As they exploded, Germ amplified their force with his destructive powers. Eventually, however, Nyx began to fight through the explosions, and she swung her tail at Germ. With no way to dodge, Germ took the blow head-on. The lights went out again.

“Germ!”, called Darby.

Germ gave a weak response, “Great. Now, it’s broken ribs and a concussion.”

“Can you still fight?”, asked Darby.

“That’s going to be a no. I can barely stand right. Ugh, head injuries are the worst.”, complained Germ.

Darby realized she would have to face Nyx by herself, without any way of seeing her. She thought for a few moments about how she could win this. One solution came to mind. What if she could
see through the void with her seer powers like the fraymotif. Focusing in on the nothingness surrounding her, she was able to get a sense of her surroundings, and…

“There!” Darby threw a null bomb, and she could tell by the pained noises of Nyx that she had hit her target. She could then hear Nyx moving toward her. She dodged when she sensed the concentration of void energy make a sudden movement at her from above. A large slam hit the floor where she had just been standing.

Darby began throwing more bombs now that she could sense her target. With this strategy, Darby was able to deal some massive damage to Nyx. Eventually, she came down to her last Null bomb. This had to be the last blow. Focusing in extremely hard, Darby was able to make out a clearer shape of Nyx.

Darby, seeing where Nyx’s head was, flew at it with the last null bomb in her hand. She avoided a few tail swipes, and once she had reached her face, she threw the bomb. Through sheer luck, the bomb went into Nyx’s mouth. A muffled explosion was heard, and the lights returned once more, revealing the massive grist pile that was falling from where Nyx had been.

Germ was laying in a corner of the room, clutching his ribs. Darby flew over to him and lifted him up, allowing him to use her for support. Slowly, she led him to the exit portal, where they would be able to get him some help for his injuries.

Ed’s denizen was Cetus. Lori and he had found her on a large, circular island that was surrounded by mountains. A quick fly over the mountains revealed a giant temple, which, when entered, led them to Cetus’ chamber. She was waiting for them when they got there.

Cetus stared at them for a few moments, until Edward spoke up, “Look, we both know what I’m here for. Can we just get this over with? I have friends to get back to.”

Yes, we can.

Edward made the first strike. He rocketed toward Cetus to punch her in the face, but pillars of energy began shooting up from the ground. Ed avoided many of them through luck alone, but then, Cetus hit him with her tail while he was busy dodging, throwing him aside.

That’s not going to work. Depending on your luck will get you nowhere.

Lori came from behind and attempted to get in a sneak attack, but one of the pillars of energy happened to hit her just as she was about to make contact.

I have luck, too, and a lot more of it than you.

“Ed, I have an idea. I need you to feel light in your heart.”, said Lori.

“What does that even mean?”, asked Ed as he dodged another tail swing.

“I don’t know how to explain it. You just need to feel it. Feel light as if it was a part of you.”

“I’ll try.”, replied Ed, unsure of himself and Lori’s plan.

Ed focused deep within himself, allowing his luck to shield him from any incoming blows, while Lori made sure Cetus’ tail didn’t hit him.

How is luck a part of me? What am I lucky to have?
My friends? My life? Cool powers?

There are a lot of things I’m fortunate enough to have.

Is that it? I’m not sure.

Lori sensed the spark within Ed’s soul and immediately grabbed a hold of his heart.

What just happened?

Don’t lose focus. Your luck won’t last forever.

Just think of everything you’re grateful for.

Lori empowered Ed’s soul, and with it, his sense of luck and fortune.

I really am lucky, aren’t I? I’m one of six people chosen to play this game. I’m here because of no reason other than I just happened to be good friends with Candy. Billions of other people weren’t that fortunate.

While Lori was busy giving Ed heart, Cetus took the opportunity to attack Edward. Ed’s body seemed to move on its own, avoiding the attack completely. He opened his eyes. He hadn’t meant to do that.

“What was that?”, wondered Edward.

“Ed, go! Just let your light guide you!”, commanded Lori.

Ed mindlessly dodged another tail swipe and flew at Cetus. More pillars of light shot up from the ground, but none of them could hit him. When Ed reached Cetus, he began a flurry of punches and kicks, all of them precise and powerful. Ed went to throw a powerful punch, but his body forced him back out of the way of a pillar of energy, then to the side of a tail swipe.

“Woah, this is so weird! It’s awesome.”

Ed threw another series of punches and kicks. He was slowly gaining the upper hand. Lori even joined in as well. Her damage output was considerably higher than Ed’s, so the battle began going much quicker.

As a last-ditch effort, Cetus summoned a ball of dense light magic above her. It began shooting giant lasers in all directions. Lori protected herself with her heart, and Ed just didn’t seem to care. None of them hit him at all. Finally, with a final, massive punch, Edward finished Cetus off.

“Whew, that was a tough one.”, said Edward.

“That was nothing compared to my denizen.”

“Well, that’s probably because there were two of us. I don’t know if I would have made it if you weren’t here.”

“You’d probably be more powerful by the time you fought her if we weren’t here.”

“I guess. We should probably get back to the others now.”

Lori nodded, “Yeah, probably.”
Lori and Ed collected the grist and traveled through the exit gate. With all six denizens dead, all that was left was to kill Eide, Eine, Jack, and the black king, and then, they would win the game.

Once everyone had gathered at Cayden’s again, Angus called for everyone’s attention.

Alright, it’s finally time to make the final push. There are only a few more preparations left to be put in place. First, Karen should’ve healed everyone, am I correct?”

Everyone nodded.

“Good. Next, we need to equip the post-scratch players with better weapons as well as buy their fraymotifs. Once you’ve done that, meet back here, and we’ll discuss the battle plan.”

Everyone nodded again and went off with their dancestors to forge some god tier weapons and buy fraymotifs.

Candy built a Bulwark of Faith and the Hew of Conviction, a shield and axe respectively that both could act as a much better catalyst for Candy’s hope powers than her previous weapons.

Cayden crafted the Calamity Cannon, a powerful pistol that would afflict his enemies with doom magic, much like what Eide did, though less powerful.

Nick received a Zephyr Breaker. Upon contact, this hammer would break the enemies’ breath, and thus their resolve. This, along with the Fear No Anvil, would make for some interesting strategies in combat.

Karen built a pair of yo-yos, the Mortality Sappers. They drain the life of anything they hit. Karen could use these to supplement her healing powers.

Ed forged the Shining Strikes, a set of gloves and boots that would more easily find an enemy’s weak spot. Essentially, Edward would get critical hits more often, in video game terms.

Darby simply crafted a large supply of Germ’s null bombs. They were very powerful, though Darby also made a variety of other, more precise explosives, because she knew that in this upcoming fight, the chances that her friends would be grouped up around Eide were pretty high.

After the weapons had been created, the fraymotifs were up next. All everyone had to do was find a consort merchant and buy all of the fraymotifs using the money the pre-scratch players had earned in their year on the meteor.

With all of the preparations complete, all that was left was to wait for Selmers and Bombshell to wake up, explain the plan to everyone, and then wait for Eide. In the meantime, the group passed the time by making small talk and pumping themselves up for this final fight.

A few hours later, Selmers and Bombshell woke up.

Bombshell yawned, “So, I’m guessing everyone made it out alright?”

“Yep.”, replied Mae, “We’ve been waiting here for a few hours, actually.”

“Sorry to keep you waiting. Is there a plan?”, asked Selmers.

“Well, now that you’re both awake, I can start explaining how this is going to go down.”, said Angus.

“Well? What’s the plan?”, urged Bombshell.
“Okay. When Eide arrives, I want Mae and Karen in the back. If Mae dies, we can’t bring her back, and if Karen dies, we can’t bring anyone back. Understand?” Angus looked at Mae.

“Fine.”, replied Mae, clearly unhappy with not being able to participate in the fight.

“Right. First, Lori is going to attempt to rip Eide’s soul from the sprite. Once that happens, I want Bombshell to be ready to chuck something useless in as fast as you can get it to go.”

Bombshell nodded.

“What if that doesn’t work?”, questioned Selmers.

“If it doesn’t work… just hope that it works.”

“Great. No plan B.”, said Bea.

“I wish there was a plan B, I really do, but with how powerful Eide’s become, we couldn’t hope to take him head-on in any sense. We will, however, have any ranged fighters distracting Eide while Lori extracts his soul.”

“Anything else?”, asked Bea.

“That’s about it. Mae and Karen stay back, Lori will take Eide’s soul, Bombshell will have something ready to prototype into the sprite. Oh, Bombshell, could you also try to have a portal ready in case we need to escape and regroup?”

“Got it.”

“Then that’s it. We can do the same thing with Eine when we get around to it, and we can just kill Jack. After all that, we can kill the black king, win SBURB, and create the new universe.”

“So, what do we do while we wait for Eide?”, asked Mae.

“You won’t have to do anything, because I’m already here.”

Eide appeared in front of everybody, and they were all quick to pull out their weapons.

“Ha ha ha, so you think you can defeat me? I do have to admit, boosting everyone to god tier was a smart idea, but it won’t save you. Also, I see that Mae is alive again. I think we should fix that.” As the grin on Eide’s face came to its fullest, Lori reached out and grabbed Eide’s soul.

“What? What are you doing?”

“I’m finishing the job!”, yelled Lori as she began to tear at Eide’s soul. He screamed, and he attempted to fly at Lori, but Gregg and Nick pushed him back with sustained winds. The effect that having his soul ripped out of the sprite had was weakening him, and he couldn’t fight back. Everyone watched in awe as the shape of Eide began to separate from the sprite. When Eide attempted to shoot Lori with a laser, Angus deflected it with his own.

Everything was going better than planned. This would be it! This would finally bring an end to all of their pain and suffering!

Suddenly, out of thin air, Jack appeared and stabbed Lori in the back with his knife.

*Heroic.*
He was surrounded by the same aura that Eide was.

“Lori!”, yelled Mae. In an impulsive bout of anger, she flew at Jack, wanting to avenge Lori.

“Mae, no!”, called Gregg. He flew to stop Mae, and Angus wasn’t quick enough to stop him this time.

Then, Eine appeared, and he, too, was surrounded by the aura of Skaia.

“What the hell is happening?!”, asked Bea.

Eide had recovered from Lori’s attempt on his life, “Dammit! You… you almost killed me! That’s it! I’m done playing games! Everyone dies, NOW!” Suddenly, Eide felt an extremely powerful impact in his side, like a planet had just crashed into him.

Bombshell had just shot her planet at Eide. He was reeling back from the pain this caused him.

“How’d you like that?! Here, have some more!” Bombshell brought her planet back and launched it again. She felt bad for the consorts, but Eide needed to be taken down. Growling, Eide rushed at Bombshell, but something got in his way. It had appeared out of nothing.

“Selmers? But how?”, wondered Bombshell as she looked at Selmers, who had just seemingly teleported in front of her. Eide didn’t hesitate to impale her with a spectral blade as his only goal was to make everyone pay.

“Well, this is awkward.”, said Selmers, who was also standing at Bombshell’s side.

“There are two of you? But that means this is…”

“Yes. It’s a time clone. I guess this means I have to go back to save you now.”

“Wait, Selmers, no!”, but it was too late. Selmers had already gone back to sacrifice herself. Eide pulled his blade out of the time clone, and she fell to the floor.

**Heroic.**

Candy and her friends decided to try and take on Eine. Candy filled herself with hope and charged, but Eine did something she wasn’t expecting. He stuck his hand out, and purple energy radiated from it. Candy’s hope dissipated, and Eine used the opportunity to stab her through the heart.

**Heroic.**

Karen went to help Candy, but Cayden stopped her, “Don’t. If you bring her back now, she’ll only die again. Stay back!”

Eine heard this. “So, she’s the one who can revive people. I think it’s best we take her out then.” Eine charged a laser beam and fired. Cayden was barely able to push Karen to the side before it went through his torso. For a moment, he stood, clutching the newly formed hole in his side, until he collapsed.

**Heroic.**

“Oh, my god, Cayden!”, cried Karen as she went to Cayden’s side.

Nick used Eine killing Cayden to sneak up behind him. He was about to bring down his Fear No Anvil when Eine turned around and froze him in time. He then pumped doom magic into him, and
Eine released him from his time stop, letting him fall limply to the ground.

*Heroic.*

Mae rushed to attack Jack for killing Lori, but Gregg was gaining on her. His wind powers gave him a speed advantage. Jack prepared to stab whichever of them reached him first. Eide saw this and became angry.

“No! Those two are mine!”, he yelled as he teleported in front of Jack. This happened just as Gregg passed Mae in the race to Jack. At this point, it was too late for either of them to slow down, so Gregg made a final push to throw himself between Mae and Eide. Eide threw his fist through Gregg’s abdomen, causing him to cough up blood as he collapsed in front of Mae.

*Heroic.*

Mae was frozen in shock, and the anger built inside of her even more, but Bea came in and pulled Mae to the side as Eide attacked her, just barely managing to avoid death. Edward then came in and began fighting Eide, to somewhat more effect than even Mae. His luck wouldn’t last forever, though.

“Bombshell, we need to go! Open a portal!”, demanded Angus.

Bombshell nodded, but when she tried to get away from Eide, he chased her, matching her speed.

“Bombshell, cover your eyes!” called Germ as he threw a flash grenade. Bombshell covered her eyes with her arms, and Eide was completely blinded for a few moments. Bombshell used this to get away and open a portal.

When Eide recovered, he growled in anger and ran down Germ, killing him with more doom magic.

*Heroic.*

“Karen, please, take Gregg and leave.”, pleaded Angus.

“What? I’m not just leaving you here!”

“Please, I’m begging you. If you die, he can’t come back!”

“What about you? You’re coming, too, right?”, asked Karen.

“I’ll only come if you and Mae make it out first.”

“Fine, I’ll take Gregg for you, but I’m coming back for everyone else, okay?”

“…Okay.”

While Karen went to grab Gregg’s corpse, Bea was trying to convince Mae to leave.

“Mae, you need to leave.”

“No! I can help!”

“Please, you can’t fight these people. We need to leave and try to regroup.”

“But he killed Gregg!”
“Yes, and we can bring him back, but only if Karen makes it out alive. Bombshell opened a portal. Karen just grabbed Gregg’s body. You should go get Selmers. Her time powers will be useful in getting our bodies when you come back for us.”, explained Bea.

“What about you?”

“I’m staying here until you’re out. I need to know that you’ll be okay. Now, will you please leave for me?”

“Dammit, fine! As soon as I’m through the portal, I’d better see you following me, okay?!?”

“I promise.”

Mae ran off to grab Selmers. When she tried to pick her up, she began to hate being small. It made carrying people so much harder. She saw Darby engaged with Jack, Ed fighting Eide, and Bea fighting Eine, while Karen was moving toward the portal that Bombshell was keeping open out of sight. Mae slowly made her way toward her.

It didn’t take long to reach the portal, and Mae and Karen both entered. The portal led to somewhere in the veil. They were on a random meteor in space. They dropped Gregg and Selmers, and Karen was ready to go back in.

When they looked back through the portal, however, things had gone horribly wrong in the few seconds they had turned around. Eide finally struck Ed down after realizing he could just cancel out his light powers his void energy. After that, it was a simple matter of stabbing him.

*Heroic.*

After that, he had his targets on Angus. He fired a laser straight at Angus. He prepared to attempt to shield himself, but before the beam reached him, Bea pushed him out of the way and took the beam herself.

*Heroic.*

“BEA!”, screamed Mae, which got the attention of Eide.

“Oh, hell no! You are NOT getting away from me.” He sent another beam at the portal.

“Bombshell, close the portal!”, demanded Angus. She nodded and quickly did so.

“Wait, no!”, yelled Karen, but it was too late. The portal had been closed. Bombshell, Angus, and Darby were still on the other side. It was only Mae and Karen, alone.
They had failed. They were so close, but they failed.

“We can still make it.”, said Karen, “We have to go back for them.”

“But he knows you exist now! He’s not going to keep them there!”’, argued Mae, who was pacing around anxiously, ready to burst.

“What do we do then?”, asked Karen.

“I don’t know! Maybe, we should revive Gregg and Selmers. They might have an idea.”

“Right…” Karen rose Selmers and Gregg from the dead.

They both began to wake up.

“What? Where did everyone go? Where am I?”, questioned Gregg as he struggled to process his surroundings.

“I could ask the same thing? Did you win?”, asked Selmers.

Mae quickly gave both of them a big hug, “Everything went wrong! We lost! I don’t know how we’re going to get everyone back! I don’t know what to do!”

“Woah, calm down. Tell us everything that happened after we died.”, said Selmers.

“Okay, okay, okay. Um, after you died, Candy died, Cayden died, Nick died, then, Gregg died. Bea pulled me out of the fight. Then, Germ died, and Bea told me to leave and take Selmers, and Karen was leaving through a portal that Bombshell made carrying Gregg, and I followed her, but when I looked back, Ed and Bea died! Karen tried to go back in, but Angus told Bombshell to close the portal, and we couldn’t get back through in time!”, Mae explained rapidly, almost going into a full-on panic attack.

“Angus is still there?!!”, yelled Gregg, who was now on the verge of panicking himself.

“He’s probably dead! You saw what Eide was like! They’re all dead! Everyone’s dead!”, cried Mae out of anguish and terror.

“Oh my god…” Gregg’s mind went blank as he thought of losing Angus.

“Okay, we all need to calm down. We’re still alive, and we’re going to get everyone back.”, said Selmers.

“How?”, asked Mae.

“Well, we’ll sneak into wherever they’re hiding them, if they took them at all, which they probably did, and we’ll take the bodies away, so we can revive them.”

“How will we even find where they are?”, asked Karen.

“Derse.”, said Gregg, “They have Derse under their control and a giant prison complex. Cayden told me about it while we were waiting for Eide. He was trapped in there last night, and he almost escaped, but he was caught by Eine and Jack. They’re probably hiding them there.”
“I guess that would be a good first place to look.”

“Well, come on. We’re getting Angus back.” demanded Gregg with a hardness in his voice that covered the unending fear he felt inside himself. He searched the sky until he found Derse in the distance. Taking off, everyone else followed without question.

The flight to Derse was silent. No one had anything to say about their situation. When they reached Derse, they found a safe place to land and went to discuss how they were going to go about saving everyone.

“We should save Bombshell first. She can portal us out if we need to leave early.”, suggested Selmers.

“I’m not leaving without Angus!””, replied Gregg harshly.

“No one said we were leaving without Angus. It’s just if we get spotted before we find him,” Karen was cut off.

“Then I’ll fight my way to him myself!”

“Gregg, what if Eide or someone finds us? You can’t fight him. You remember what he did to you, right??!””, argued Mae.

“Don’t tell me what I can and can’t do!”, yelled Gregg, “Now, let’s go.” Gregg began walking toward the royal palace, careful to keep to alleyways and places that were mostly out of sight. Everyone else followed reluctantly.

Once they reached the royal palace, Gregg motioned for everyone to hide. There were two guards out front as well as a few circling the perimeter.

“I got this.”, said Selmers as she proceeded to stop time around her. She made sure to keep the inside of the castle moving at a normal speed so as to not alert Eide by having him feel the change.

“Come on, let’s go.”

The four quickly jumped over one of the walls and snuck inside. There were more guards roaming the halls. Gregg waited until he could see one of the guards alone. He then reached his hand out, ripping the literal breath from them, causing them to suffocate to death.

“Holy shit, you’re an effin’ sith lord, Gregg!”, whispered Mae.

“Uh-huh. Let’s go.”. replied Gregg, not seeming to care about Mae’s statement. Gregg dragged the body into a separate room, so it wouldn’t be discovered. They passed most of the guards this way until they reached the bridge leading to the prison wing.

There were three guards stationed at the entrance to the prison. Mae, Gregg, and Karen carefully coordinated an attack with Selmers’ time powers, and they took all three down at the same time before they had the chance to scream.

“Okay, so, here’s a question. Why would Eide want to keep corpses in a prison? Why not just bury them somewhere we wouldn’t think to look?”’, asked Selmers.

“Right now, this is our best shot.”, replied Gregg, “I’m not leaving without Angus.”

Gregg led the group deeper into the prison, taking down guards along the way and hiding them. They traveled further and further, all in complete silence save for the sound of bodies hitting the
“This place is huge! How are we ever going to find anybody?”, wondered Mae.

“We just keep going until we get somewhere.”, said Gregg. Seeing as there was no backup plan, everyone accepted this as a reasonable answer.

Eventually, they reached the very back of the prison complex. There was only one more hallway to travel down. When everyone reached the door to the final room, they heard screams and groans of pain coming from it.

“Angus!”, yelled Gregg as he threw open the door. The image he saw filled him with dread. Eide was floating there, twisting a knife into Angus’ stomach. There, lined up along the walls, were all of the people that had died in the fight with Eide, Eine, and Jack. Also, they were all alive, except for Lori, who remained with a knife wound in her chest.

“Oh, look. I guess you didn’t have to tell me where they were after all. I should’ve known they would come for you.”, said Eide as he withdrew the ethereal knife.

“What the hell are you doing to him?!?” It took all of Gregg’s will not to immediately charge Eide.

“Well, you four were missing, and he knew where you were, being a mage of mind and all, but he wouldn’t tell me where you were, so I had to… motivate him.”

“Gregg, leave, please.”, begged Angus weakly.

“Selmers, when I say go, I want you to free everyone as fast as you can.”, said Gregg, his voice trembling.

“I wouldn’t recommend that. You remember what happened last time, don’t you?”, warned Eide.

Gregg continued anyways, “Mae, steal all of my rage.”

“What?”

“Just do it!”, growled Gregg. Mae hesitantly complied, stealing all of his rage. She felt it hit her like a truck. There was so much.

Gregg took a deep breath, “Karen, I need you to be healing me at all times. When I die, you will revive me.”

“What? But you don’t have another life to spend on dying heroically!”, argued Karen.

“She has a point. You should listen to her before you do something you’ll regret.”, added Eide.

“I’m not being heroic, though.”, said Gregg.

“What? You want to free your friends, don’t you?”

“See, that’s the thing. I’m not angry at you anymore. I don’t even want to fight, but there’s something in me that’s forcing me to. Survival instinct, maybe? Who knows?”

Eide finally realized what he was doing, “Oh, you sneaky son of a-“

“Now.”, Said Gregg, interrupting Eide. He flew at Eide, taking all the breath he had stolen on his way here as well as a bunch he was still getting from around Derse and using it to propel himself
forward. Karen began healing him, and Selmers stopped time and began freeing everyone.

Gregg, as he reached Eide, swung his right dagger, casually sending forth a blade of wind that he barely dodged, letting it fly into the wall. The wind left a giant hole in the wall as it went clean through. Eide used his doom magic on Gregg, and he began falling for a moment, but within a few seconds, he woke up and rose again.

“What? How did he do that?”, wondered Mae.

Selmers was about to grab Angus, but Eide teleported and grabbed him, bringing him over to hold over Gregg.

He made a knife and held it to Angus’ neck, “Now, you’re either going to stop, or I’m going to kill him.”

“Gregg, just leave me here. I’ll be fine. Get everyone else out of here.”, begged Angus.

“Oh, you just made it heroic. Also, I’m afraid you’re all going to have to stay. If you cooperate, I may just spend a little less time torturing you before I kill you, and, as a bonus, I’ll even leave the dream bubble alone. Your souls can all slowly rot in that dying town that you were too weak to save.”

Gregg didn’t know what to do. Mae was struggling to contain all of Gregg’s emotions, and Gregg could feel that she was faltering. Everything he felt about Angus, about Eide, about Casey, they were bubbling up inside of him. Soon, he wouldn’t be able to fight, but he didn’t know if he could stop himself if the full onslaught of sadness and anger came back to him.

“Stop right now.”, Karen walked up with Lori’s corpse, “If you kill him, I’ll revive Lori. You’re alone. There’s no one to save you when she rips out your soul again.”

“What are the chances she’ll be able to process everything that’s happening before I kill her again?”, asked Eide.

“I’ll protect her myself. It’s not like any of us can be revived again anyways. If I die, at least she’ll be able to kill you.”

“Karen! Don’t do this!”, yelled Cayden.

Eide chuckled a bit, “A valiant effort, I must say, but unfortunately for you, I’m not letting that happen again.” He surrounded himself in a heart aura, “If she tries to infiltrate my soul again, this will prevent it. Drop the body.”

There was a stare down between Karen and Eide, but ultimately, Karen lost her nerve. She dropped Lori and backed down. Cayden sighed with relief. As Karen backed away, however, she looked up behind Eide. She smiled confidently and turned around, “Bombshell, now!”

Bombshell pulled her arm in, and Eide turned around just in time for something to swallow Angus along with his arm. He howled in pain.

“Everyone through, now!”, commanded Bombshell.

Gregg flew in after seeing Angus taken through the portal. Karen picked up Lori’s body and flew threw as well. Soon, everyone else was flying through one by one.

“What the fuck did you do to my arm?! Get back here!”, screamed Eide as he went to follow
everyone through the portal. He was too late to catch the portal before it disappeared.

“Damn it!” yelled Eide as the portal closed. He began to focus on his arm, regenerating it with his life and blood magic. “Eine better finish fast.”

Bombshell had once again taken the group to the veil. Karen quickly revived Lori.

“Huh? What happened?”, wondered Lori as she looked around at all of her friends.

Everyone filled her as well as each other in on what had happened. After Bombshell closed the portal, Angus, Darby, and she made a futile last stand against Eide, Eine, and Jack, who had quickly killed them. They later woke up in the room in the back of the prison, all except for Lori, who Eide made sure stayed dead, as she was the only threat to him out of the group. He had begun trying to torture information out of Angus and Bombshell, leaving them on the brink of death several times until Mae and the others came.

“Are you okay? How bad did he hurt you?”, asked Gregg.

“I’m fine. Thank you for coming to get me.”, answered Angus.

“Of course, I came for you! I couldn’t just leave you there!”

Mae turned to Bea and hugged her, “I’m so glad you’re okay! I’m sorry that had to happen to you!”

Bea hugged Mae back, “It’s not like I haven’t been through it before. I’m just glad that you’re okay.”

While everyone was busy reuniting with one another, the meteor began to shake violently. Then, it began to rocket toward Skaia.

“What’s going on? Why are we heading to Skaia?”, asked Mae frantically.

“No, it can’t be. The reckoning isn’t supposed to happen this early. Did Prospit lose already?”, pondered Angus.

“Bombshell, take me to Prospit. If we’ve really lost, I might be able to send more forces. I could stall it for a little while.”, requested Candy.

“Alright, give me a sec.” Bombshell quickly opened a portal to Prospit, and Candy and she jumped through.

“We’ll be right back.”, assured Candy just before the portal closed.

“Why is the reckoning happening already?”, wondered Angus still.

“What if Eine’s there? He wasn’t with Eide, and neither was Jack. They’re probably what’s causing this.”, reasoned Bea.

“Wait, so we’re being taken straight to Eine and Jack?!”, exclaimed Gregg.

“It’s a possibility. We should be prepared in any case.”, said Angus.

“If he’s alone, and we know Jack could be there, we could try the soul thing again. There are fourteen of us. I’m sure that’ll be enough to distract Jack long enough for me to separate Eine from the sprite.”, suggested Lori.
“That might not work. If Eine puts up a soul barrier like Eide, we won’t be able to reach his soul.”, argued Angus.

“What do we do then?”

“His power can’t be infinite like Eide’s, right? He didn’t absorb Skaia. I’m assuming Eide just gave him and Jack the power. If that’s the case, all we have to do is wear it down.”, said Angus.

“I guess that’s all we can really do about Eine, but what about Jack?”, questioned Bea.

“Same thing. We wear him down, and since he’s not immortal, we can just kill him.”

“Isn’t the black king there, too? What about him?”, asked Bombshell.

“We’ll kill him, too. If the reckoning is really happening, this is our last chance. If any of us die, we’re dead for good. If we don’t win, we all die. There’s no way out anymore. This has to end now.”, said Angus. Everyone was quiet. This would be their last push for freedom. Mae quietly pulled Lori over to the side to talk to her about something.

“Lori, I need to ask something of you.”

“What is it?”

“We’re going to have to fight Eide before the game is over. There’s no way around it. We can’t rely on your heart powers anymore, either. I think I have a backup plan in case things go bad, and I need you to do it.”

“Okay…” Lori wasn’t sure she wanted to know where this was going.

“If I tell you to, I need you to transfer Eide’s soul directly into mine.”

“What?! You can’t-“ Mae put a hand over her mouth.

“Shut up! I don’t want anyone else to know about this because they’ll try to stop me. If I give you a signal, I’m going to grab onto Eide, and I want you to put his soul into mine. It should be easier since you’re only transferring the soul, not ripping it out.”, explained Mae.

“What are you going to do after that?!”, questioned Lori, still in disbelief that Mae would suggest something like this.

“Once I have him inside of my soul, I’ll try my best to kill him there. A long time ago, back before the dream bubbles existed, me, Bea, and Angus had a dream together, and I think we fought the black goat in it, or at least something it created. If I can take the black goat on again, I might be able to kill him, but that also means you can’t let him escape. Keep him in my soul until one of us wins.”

“What if you lose?”, asked Lori nervously.

“Then I want you to kill me.”

Lori was stunned into silence. After a moment of silence, she finally spoke, “But that’s a heroic death. What about us? What about Bea? You can’t just leave like that!”

“Lori, I know it’s hard, but I need you to do this for me. It might be the only way for everyone to be free. If I lose in the end, I want you to tell Bea something. Tell her that I love her and that she’d better keep living a happy life in the new universe that I died to create. Tell her that I’m sorry that I
never was able to repay her for everything she’s done for me since I got back. Can you promise me that I can count on you to follow through with all of this if push comes to shove?”

“… Fine. I’ll do it, but please, please don’t die.”

“I’ll try my best.”, said Mae, as she went back to rejoin the group. They were almost at Skaia. Then, a portal opened, and Candy stepped out, followed by Bombshell.

“So, what did we miss?”, asked Bombshell. The group filled her in on what was happening and what the plan was. Lori stood silently in the back, afraid of what might happen in the upcoming battle.

“Good. Sounds like we have a plan. I’ve mobilized all of the remaining troops of Prospit. They should be on Skaia before long.”, said Candy.

“That’s good. It never hurts to have more troops.”, replied Angus.

In a few minutes, the meteor was about to hit Skaia’s meteor defense barrier, so everyone flew off, watching as the meteor was taken through a portal to the other side of Skaia. The portals looked just like the gates they had all been traveling through over the course of the game.

“So, that’s what the defense system looks like.”, commented Angus as he and everyone else flew down to Skaia. Looking down, everyone saw the carnage that had been left behind by the war. Prospitans and Dersites laid strewn about with blood covering the ground.

“Look, it’s the black king!”, called Mae, pointing at the lumbering giant in the distance.

“Yeah, let’s get that out of the way.”, said Bombshell as she readied her planet to be thrown again. She positioned it next to her thumb and flicked it as if she were playing with marbles. It soared off, and everyone could tell when it hit by how he stumbled back before falling to the ground, dead.

“Holy shit.”, mumbled Mae to herself. Everyone else was amazed by this as well, especially the post-scratch players.

“That was supposed to be the final boss! You just killed it in one shot!”, exclaimed Nick.

“Pretty neat, huh? Now, let’s findEine and murder his ass.”, replied Bombshell. It didn’t take long to spot Eine and Jack, as they were both floating high above the battlefield. They were making movements with their hands.

“Wait, it’s them! They’re the ones causing the reckoning! They’re sending the meteors into Skaia themselves!”, exclaimed Angus.

“Alright, this ends now!”, said Lori as she flew at Eine. He only was able to notice her as she grabbed onto his soul.

“Got you! You’re dead!”, yelled Lori as she pulled on his soul. Jack saw this and quickly went to kill Lori, but bombshell was there in an instant. She took out her Deringer and engaged with Jack. Gregg and Nick kept Eine back like they did Eide.

Bombshell was able to cut off Jack’s ring, but it didn’t seem to have any effect other than causing Jack a large amount of pain. The power of the ring seemed inconsequential compared to the power Eide had given them. Jack quickly regrew his finger and resumed fighting.

Mae came up behind Jack and hit him in the back of the head with her bat. He turned around and
stabbed at her, but she dodged out of the way. Jack also dodged a magic blast from Angus. He was being overwhelmed. Now that they had gotten the jump on them, they had the advantage.

With one last pull, Eine fell from the sprite, leaving only a ring for the sprite to take the form of.

“No, this can’t be!”, yelled Eine as he fell. His fall was cut short as Lori stabbed him with her rapier. The essence of the black goat then emptied out of Eine, leaving him for dead. Lori quickly grabbed hold of the essence and crushed it, allowing it to fade into nothing. She then summoned her sprite, which was also Ed’s sprite, and told it to prototype itself into the ring sprite. It did this and gained the power of the ring, as well as the leftover power from Eide.

Jack, now alone, became desperate. He expelled a large amount of his breath power to blow everyone back. Then, he sent out a wave of doom magic in an attempt to kill everyone. Karen, however, intercepted it with her life magic, the antithesis of doom magic.

Jack was quickly losing all of his doom energy. He had to make a final push now. He drew in everything he had left and sent it out all at once. Karen felt her life magic failing to contain the doom that was radiating from Jack. Lori, seeing this, powered her up with heart, and she was once again able to fight back.

Jack, in an attempt to stop Karen’s interference, shot all of his remaining breath at her in the form of a precision wind blast. Nick jumped in front of her and attempted to destroy all of it, but it was breaking through. Gregg then came in and stole a large portion of the breath, which made it more manageable for Nick, who was able to dispose of the remaining wind.

Angus tried shooting magic into the doom field, but Jack made it into nothing with his void magic. There was a stalemate. Both Jack and Karen were giving everything they had, and neither could overcome the other.

“I can’t believe you both failed so easily.” Eide came from behind Jack and stuck his hand through his heart, taking back all of the energy he had given him. Jack fell out of the sky, lifeless, and Eide floated there, staring condescendingly down at the group.

“So, are we going to fight or what?”, asked Eide as he put up a heart barrier.

Mae was once again the first to strike. She stole the rage of entire armies and charged. Eide canceled it with hope like he had the last time, and he was about to kill Mae again when Angus and Selmers used Temporal Reprise, creating a timeline where Mae still had her rage and forcing everyone into it. This caught Eide off guard, and Mae was able to strike him with full force. He didn’t flinch.

“Nice try.” Eide filled Mae with doom magic, but this time, Karen countered it with life. Then, Candy and Edward activated their fraymotif, Blessed Concerto, blessing Mae with massive amounts of good fortune.

Gregg and Nick used their fraymotif, Fortissimo Cyclone, where Gregg stole as much breath from Eide as he could, and Nick used it to create a cyclone of incredible destructive force. Mae was lucky to be thrown out of the twister before it could do any real damage to her.

Eide was only slightly annoyed at being tossed around in the cyclone. He quickly broke out of the cyclone and was about to make an attack when Selmers and Bombshell activated Adagio Redshift, warping spacetime around Eide.

Lori took the chance to boost everyone’s heart by a considerable amount. When Eide broke out of
the Adagio Redshift, he considered using mind to destroy the heart barriers, but he decided against it, knowing that creating mind would run the risk of canceling out his heart barrier.

Instead, Eide gathered a windstorm around him, intending to obliterate everyone with it. Soon, everyone was being thrown around by the wind. Gregg couldn’t contain all of it, and Nick couldn’t destroy all of it. Eide eventually curved the wind down, slamming everyone into the ground. He then let out a massive blast of eldritch energy in all directions, wounding everyone greatly.

Everyone struggled to even stand. Bea called for Karen to use their fraymotif, Remedial Symphony. It healed everybody to an almost completely renewed state. Eide saw this, and teleported in front of Karen, stabbing her with an ethereal blade. Angus seeing this, activated Temporal Reprise with Selmers again, creating another timeline where Karen avoided the blow.

“I don’t know how many more timelines I can create, Angus.\textsuperscript{,} warned Selmers. Eide went to stab Karen again, but suddenly, a time clone appeared with a clone of Candy behind her. Candy blocked the blow with her shield, and the time clone took her back into the future.

Eide attacked again, but Karen dodged this time, throwing her yo-yos around Eide. She began to suck the life out of him with the yo-yos. Eide quickly broke out, the strings of both yo-yos snapping, leaving Karen weaponless.

Gerb and Darby used Nihility Duet, but Eide simply canceled it out with light. They both began throwing bombs at him, but they had no effect.

“You can’t win. Why are you even trying? Come on, death can’t be that bad. You’ll be free of your pain, your sorrow, your stress, everything. All I need is some repayment for what you did to me, and you’ll be free of the worries of life.\textsuperscript{,} said Eide.

Lori came up from behind Eide and punched him, attempting to destroy the heart barrier he had put up. It cracked slightly, and she pushed harder, but Eide quickly grabbed her, kicking her to the ground. He floated down and put his foot on her.

“Tell me why I shouldn’t crush you right now. It wouldn’t be hard.”

Lori said nothing.

“That’s what I thought.” Eide was about to crush Lori when Lori’s sprite came and knocked Eide off his feet.

“You. You stole my power from Eine, didn’t you?\textsuperscript{,} asked Eide.

The sprite said nothing and summoned forth a windstorm to entrap Eide. She then flew inside and from the outside, there was a giant bright light from inside the storm. Eide stopped the windstorm by using his own wind to blow against it. Lori’s sprite had attempted to blast Eide with a huge amount of hope magic, but it didn’t work. Eide did seem at least somewhat hurt by this, though.

“Give it back!\textsuperscript{,} yelled Eide as he stuck his hand in the sprite, draining all of the power she had. He then blasted her back with an energy blast. While Eide did this, Mae had snuck up behind him, and she took the opportunity to grab onto him.

“Lori, now!”
Lori looked at Mae. She couldn’t bring herself to do what Mae had asked.

“Lori, what are you doing?! I said do it now!”

Eide elbowed Mae in the stomach multiple times.

“Lori, please! You promised! This is the only way!”

Lori closed her eyes, looking away as she lifted up her arms. She screamed in sorrow as she took the current of Eide’s soul and directed it into Mae through the heart barrier.

“What are you doing?! No! I’ll kill her! Once I’m inside her, I will kill her! Do you hear me?!”, Eide’s voice faded as he was taken into Mae’s soul, leaving Eide’s body in the sprite lifeless. Lori quickly pulled Eide out of the sprite, leaving only the cup that Gregg had thrown in at the beginning of the game. Mae fell to her knees, and her face was completely blank.

“Mae?!”, yelled Bea as she ran over to Mae, “What did you do?”

“I’m sorry. Mae asked me to. I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.”, Lori was apologizing profusely.

“Stop apologizing. Just tell me what you did.”

“She asked me to take Eide’s soul and force it into her. She knew that it would be easier for the soul to transfer vessels than for it to completely separate from the sprite. She told me to do it as a last resort. She said she would try to fight him.”

“Oh, my god, no! Mae, why would you do that?! You goddamn idiot!”, screamed Bea.

Angus interrupted, “Do you guys know what this means? We’ve won. No matter what happens next, we can create the new universe. Eine’s dead, Jack’s dead, and if Eide tries to escape Mae’s soul, we can easily kill him. Thanks to Mae, we’ve won.”

“But Mae! She could die! Goddamn it!”

“Um, Bea? Mae actually had some last words she wanted me to give you if it came to this.”, said Lori.

Bea looked at her expectantly.

“Uh, she said that she loves you. If she dies, she said to live a happy life in the new universe she sacrificed herself in order to make. She also said that she’s sorry she never got to repay you for everything you’ve done for her since she got back from college.”

“That damn idiot. I never did anything she needed to repay me for.”

“All we can do now is hope Mae makes it out alive.”, said Angus.

“Come on, Mae. After everything we’ve been through, if you let some lousy eldritch god beat you, I’ll never forgive you.”, added Gregg.

“Please, Mae. Win for me, okay? Then, we can be happy together.”, pleaded Bea.

Mae found herself in the same black fields that she recognized from her dream with “god”. She looked around, knowing that Eide would be there somewhere.

“Looking for me?”
Mae turned around and was face to face with Eide.

“Yes, actually. Can you guess what I want to do now?”, asked Mae sarcastically.

“Kill me?”

“Bingo.”

“The fact that you think you can beat me in the dream world insults me. I’m more powerful here than I ever was in the real world.”

Mae summoned her dream bat, that being her only response to Eide’s remark.

“I can’t believe you’ve done this to me. You won. You actually won. Whether I kill you here or not, you’ve won. I’ll die either way. Goddamn it!”

“Why not just let me kill you then? I promise it’ll be painless.”

“Oh, you’d like that, wouldn’t you? No, I’m taking you with me!”

“All right. Have it your way. I’m not going down easy, though. I hope you know that.”

They both stared each other down for a few moments until both let out a warcry and charged.

*Final Strife*
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Mae charged at Eide with everything she had. She found that she didn’t have her rage powers in the dream world, but that wasn’t going to stop her. She swung her bat at Eide from the side. Eide grabbed it and threw Mae with it, shooting an energy beam after her. Mae blocked it with her bat.

Eide used the beam as a distraction and teleported behind Mae, kicking her to the ground. Mae stood back up, and she saw Eide flying down at her with a sword in his hand. She brought the bat down and swung up just as Eide reached her, hitting him straight in the jaw. He was sent flying back.

Mae didn’t let up. She jumped into the air, putting herself just over Eide. Her bat crashed into Eide. As Eide flew down to the ground, Mae threw her bat at him, hitting him in the stomach. Then, the bat returned to Mae’s hand, as if by magic.

“No, I won’t let you! I won’t let you win!” Eide charged a dense ball of dark energy. The pressure emanating from the ball was unbelievable. Mae could feel it pushing against her. With a yell, Eide threw it. Mae took her bat and met it with a swing. She pushed against it with all her might.

“I will obliterate you!”, screamed Eide as he pushed harder against the force of Mae’s bat.

Mae felt the ball slowly pushing her back. What would happen if she died? Would she even be able to live in the dream bubble? If Eide killed her here, would it completely erase her soul? What would happen then? There is no god, is there? Would she even be let into heaven after the things she’s done? Would everything just… end? No meaning, no purpose? Just death?

Mae lost herself in her thoughts, and when she regained her focus, something was different. There was a circle in front of her. Why did the circle scare her? Mae didn’t know, but she knew she wanted it gone. It was just a circle, nothing more. The mass of shapes below her seemed to offend her for some reason. They made her angry. They needed to go, too.

Effortlessly, Mae hit the dark energy ball back at Eide, and he barely moved out of the way before it exploded in the distance, leaving an immeasurable crater in its wake.

“What, how?!” yelled Eide. These words didn’t register with Mae, and she flew toward the mass of shapes before her.

“W-we can stop her! Black goat, give me everything you have! We need to make her pay!” Eide reached out, and he watched in wonder as black, tendril-like streams of energy began to wrap themselves around him.

“Yes! More! We can win!” The black began to completely enshroud Eide. Then, it began to tighten.

“What?”, asked Eide nervously. The energy began to eat away at Eide.

“What are you doing?! I thought we were in this together?!”

Yes, it is true that Mae must pay, but what about you? You have failed to serve me. Because of you, I am now doomed to die. I believe you must pay as well.
“NO! NO, PLEASE! I’M SORRY! I TRIED MY BEST, I SWEAR! PLEASE DON’T EAT ME! NOOO!” Eide’s screams were finally drowned out by the black goat as it fully consumed him. Mae was about to strike the black goat when she was surrounded by complete darkness, the only thing visible being herself and her bat, which continued to glow blue.

There were no more shapes, and this began to calm Mae’s sudden dissociative state.

Now, that incompetent fool is gone. I must congratulate you. You have outsmarted us. It is a shame that it will be at the cost of your own life.

“I’m going to win, just watch me!”

I’d like to see you try.

Mae felt a sudden impact in her back, then her front, then her side. She was being hit rapidly from all directions. She made a few attempts at hitting her assailant, but it was an effort in futility. Everything was black. She couldn’t see where she was being attacked from.

The assault ended with one huge punch to Mae’s gut. Mae stumbled back. She looked down at her arm. Something was wrong. There were shapes coming off of her arm. She was fading into shapes.

Is your soul really that weak?

Mae was slammed into the ground by the black goat, and more of her body began to turn into shapes.

Did you actually think you could win? Pathetic.

It began kicking Mae while she laid helplessly on the floor. With every strike, more of Mae’s soul began to fade.

“I’m sorry, everyone. I didn’t think it would end this way.”, said Mae weakly.

On the outside, everyone waited anxiously for Mae to wake up. Lori sat beside her along with Bea, closely monitoring her soul. She felt it when Mae’s soul began to wane.

“Mae, come on. Keep fighting.”, pleaded Lori.

“What’s going on?”, asked Bea.

“Mae’s soul is losing! It keeps getting weaker! I almost can’t feel it!”

“Mae, don’t you dare die on me!” Bea placed her hands on Mae and began giving her the power of blood.

“What are you doing?”, asked Lori.

“I have to do something! I can’t just sit here and let Mae die! This has to reach her! It has to! Everyone, help me! Think of everything Mae’s done for us! She’s our family now! I need to give her that strength!”

Everyone began to remember how much Mae cared about them. They remembered what she’s done to help them win this game. They remembered all of the good times they shared. She was their family.

Bea took this energy and gave it all to Mae, reaching deep within her soul. Suddenly, the world
around Mae became filled with a vibrant, red glow. It surrounded her. In a rush, the intense feelings of all of her friends came rushing into her.

What is this?!

“I understand now. I’ve been thinking about it all wrong.”

It doesn’t matter. I’ll still kill you!

“The universe may not care, but they do.”

Don’t ignore me!

“Angus was right. We live in a world where the universe doesn’t care, but people do.”

The black goat had enough. It charged at Mae, ready to deal a finishing blow, but Mae blocked it almost absent-mindedly.

“Why should I care about whether the universe matters or not when I have them? My friends. My family.”

The shapes reformed with Mae’s body, becoming a part of something that mattered, Mae. She then kicked the black goat hard enough to send him tumbling back. The light her friends had shown her allowed her to see it clearly.

No. It will not end this way!

The black goat began to increase in size dramatically. It became larger than some of the tallest skyscrapers. With a roar, it began trying to crush Mae beneath its hooves. She was able to push them off of her with only her bat, and she began running towards the black goat.

Why won’t you die?!

Mae jumped, “You can’t control me anymore. You can grow as big as you want, but that won’t change the fact that I’m not broken anymore. You only had power here because I was weak, and maybe, I still am, but not to you.”

The black goat fired a massive energy beam from its mouth. Mae simply hit it up, and it curved over her, and she didn’t lose any momentum.

It can’t end like this.

Mae flew straight for the black goat’s heart.

Can it?

With a thrust, Mae sailed straight through the black goat. A white light erupted from the hale that was left behind.

I guess it can. Well played, Mae Borowski.

The light exploded outwards, engulfing the black goat and blinding Mae. When Mae came to, she felt she wasn’t in the dream anymore. A black mist was expelled from her body. She opened her eyes.

“Mae? Is that you? Answer me!”, asked Bea frantically.
“Bea? I’m… back?”

Bea took that as a yes and hugged Mae tightly. Everyone else cheered for Mae’s return.

“I won. I did it! It’s over! We can all go home, now!”, exclaimed Mae.

“Alright, everyone, take your dancestors and show them how to set up the grist rig. Selmers and Bombshell, drop the genesis frog in the center of Skaia. Let’s go!”’, said Angus, and everyone went off.

Soon, everything was in place. The grist rigs were all emptied into Skaia, and the genesis frog was released. Everyone was teleported to a pad over Skaia. They were about to witness the creation of a new universe.

A beautiful, colorful light shone from Skaia, consuming it. When it disappeared, everyone could see the genesis frog. It was gigantic, and you could see the stars, the galaxies, everything. The frog was the universe.

There was a single, massive croak. The vast croak. Then, the SBURB symbol appeared on the end of the platform. It had a single door in it.

“So, this is it? We open this door, and we’re free?”, asked Gregg.

“Wait, I need to do something. I’ll be right back.”, said Bombshell. She opened a portal and hopped through.

“Mae, would you like to have the honors?”, asked Candy as she motioned to the door.

“I couldn’t. It’s your session.”

“You’re the reason this session exists. I think it should be you. You are the one who ended it, after all.”

Mae looked around at everyone. They all gave her approval to be the one to open the door.

Bombshell returned, “All right, I got all of our planets as well as Prospit and Derse.”

“Won’t the Dersites try to kill us?”, questioned Bea.

“I don’t think that’s a problem anymore. The war is over. We can have Candy announce a truce. It would be good to have people to populate the new universe.”, said Angus.

Everyone received a message on their phone.

GT: Congratulations! You did it! That was an awesome final battle!

MB: Thanks! Can this wait until after were actually in the new universe, though?

GT: Actually, I wanted to give you something.

John gave them a code.

GT: This is the code for a new Earth. You’re going to need somewhere to live, and finding a suitable planet in the vastness of space can be difficult, so we give this code to anyone who beats the game.
AD: You do realize we already poured all of our grist into Skaia, right?

GT: You still have grist from your journey, don’t you?

AD: Right. I guess we won’t really be needing it.

Bombshell took the code and created a new Earth. It looked beautiful, even if it was tiny at the moment. There were lush forests and vibrant plains. There were beautiful oceans, lakes, and rivers. It had everything.

Bombshell came back with the planet, and everyone marveled at its beauty.

“Oh, my god. It’s beautiful!”, exclaimed Mae.

“Come on, open the door already!”, urged Gregg.

“Aright, I’m doing it!” Mae walked up to the door. She slowly placed her hand on the handle. She was still processing the fact that it was finally over. Taking a deep breath, she turned the handle. The door opened, and there was a bright light. This was it. They were in the new universe.

Once inside, they were surrounded by space. Stars shone in the night sky once more.

“I can’t believe it. We’re finally here.”, said Mae, staring off into space.

“We’ve got a lot to do. We can marvel at the stars later.”, said Angus.

“I’m going to go grab a star to be the sun real quick. Candy, I’m going to leave Derse and Prospit right next to each other so you can tell them what’s happening.” Bombshell shrank Candy down so she could go on Prospit and Derse before flying toward one of the stars.

“Candy gathered up the remaining Prospitans and told them about their peace with Derse. They were surprisingly accepting of this agreement. The Dersites were very receptive as well. It seemed they never really hated each other, but their leaders did. They were happy to get along with each other.

Bombshell quickly returned with a star in her palm, “All right, I’m going to put you all on Earth, so I can essentially create a new solar system without killing anyone. Are you ready?”

Everyone nodded in agreement, and they soon found themselves on Earth. They watched in awe as they moved through space at incredible speeds while the sun grew while also moving further away. It was quite the spectacle.

The next few hours consisted of getting all of the Prospitans, Dersites, and Consorts onto the new Earth. They then put them to work building houses for everyone. Bombshell was a huge help with this due to her space powers.

The rest of the day was spent rebuilding, and by the end, they had built up many small towns for everyone to live in. The homes were divvied up amongst everyone, and soon, it was time for everyone to go to sleep.

Bombshell had taken everyone’s houses and placed them in their own little area away from everyone else. Sadly, she had completely destroyed hers while throwing her planet around at people.

“I’ve got a solution.”, said Mae, “Bea, come live with me.”
“I mean, we were living together already, so yeah. You can have my apartment.”, agreed Bea.

“Thanks. I appreciate it.”

Everyone said goodnight to each other and they all went to sleep. They were all out like lights. Today had been a long day.

Mae woke up, and she was in the dream bubble. She had anticipated this. With a yawn and a stretch, she got up and went downstairs. To her surprise, Candy was there.

“Mae? What’s going on? Where are we?”, questioned Candy.

“We’re in a dream bubble. Versions of us woke up here after they died in their timeline.”, explained Mae.

“Will there be a copy of me here?”

“I doubt it. Your session never got dream bubbles, and I doubt this one would have versions of you in it.”

“Okay. What should I expect?”

“The only thing I should probably warn you about is that the people here don’t have eyes. They’re completely white.”

“That’s strange.”

“Tell me about it.”

Mae opened the front door and was met with a sight she wasn’t expecting. There were dozens of people walking around, none of which Mae recognized.

“Mae!”, called the other Mae, “You need to come with me!”

“What? Hold on. What’s going on? Who are these people?”, questioned Mae.

“We can worry about that later. I need to show you something!”

“Fine. What do I need to see so badly?”

“You’ll see when we get there. Let’s go!” The other Mae seemed extremely excited about whatever she was about to show Mae. They all flew across town, and Mae watched as dozens of people, very few of which she only slightly recognized, passed by. As they reached the Snack Falcon, Mae saw what her other self had been so excited about.

“Casey?” Mae could see Gregg hugging him, crying his eyes out, as well as all of the others, who had gathered around to see the spectacle.

“Oh, my god, Casey!”, yelled Mae as she ran in to join in the embrace that Gregg had already started.

“Geez, guys, calm down with the hugs. What, did you miss me or something?”, said Casey.

“How? How are you here?”, asked Mae.

“I’m not really sure. The last thing I remember is the… the hole. Then, nothing until I woke up
here earlier today. I already had to go through all of this with the others. It’s weird. All of these people were thrown in that hole.”, explained Casey.

Mae looked at Casey’s eyes, which were blank like her dead-self, “Your eyes. You’re dead.”

“Am I? Is that what this place is?”

“Oh, god. So much has happened over the past few years. Where do I even start?”, wondered Mae.

“We should probably sit down and explain everything to him. I think I may know how he’s here, but it would be best if we reviewed everything first to be sure.”, said Angus.

“Man, Angus, how’s it been? You and Gregg still a thing?”, asked Casey.

Angus held up the ring, “You know it.”

“Heh, tacky. Also, congratulations. I knew you two were perfect for each other.”

“We still need to plan a wedding.”, realized Gregg.

“How long have you had the ring?”, questioned Casey.

“Over a year.”, replied Angus.

“What?! And you two still haven’t gotten married yet?!?”

“A lot’s happened. Let’s go to the diner or something, and we’ll explain it all to you.”

“Yeah. I’d especially like to know where all of these superhero pajamas came from. Also, what the hell is up with his costume?” He pointed to Germ, “Or hers?” He pointed to Lori.

“Look, we didn’t get to choose our costumes, okay?”, said Germ.

“Wait, if everyone who got thrown into the hole is here, does that mean Kasey’s here, too?”, asked Candy.

“Yeah, I’m here. My name’s Casey. Who are you?”

“No, not you. I guess it would technically be your mother?”

“They threw my mother in?!?”

“No, that’s not what I meant.”

“Wait, you lost someone to the cult, too?”, asked Gregg.

“Yes. Her name was Kasey. We were great friends since middle school, but she just disappeared. We never knew where she went until we met the cult.”, Candy explained.

“What is going on?”, wondered Casey.

“Look, let them explain it to you. I’m going to go see if Kasey’s here, and I don’t mean you.”

“Okay? Geez, what did I miss?”

“Let’s just go to the diner, okay?”, urged Mae. He agreed, and they walked toward the Clik Clak diner.
Candy ran in the other direction, scanning through the crowds of people. She tried to find Kasey or her friends. Finally, after about five minutes of searching, she saw her. Kasey was there, and she was talking with the rest of her friends.

“Kasey!”, she called as she ran to her. She stopped in front of her.

“Candy? Is that you? Wow, everyone’s here.”

“I can’t believe it! You’re actually here!.”

“Yep, it’s me. I’m back. Would you happen to know why?”, asked Kasey.

“No. We should meet up with everyone at the Clik Clak, though. They were going to explain everything to another Casey there.”

“Well, I guess we should go there then.”, said Casey.

“Yeah, let’s go.” They then made their way to the Clik Clak just in time to hear the full explanation. A few hours of convoluted storytelling later, Casey and Kasey were still confused, but they had the gist of what had happened.

“So, the world was destroyed, you played a game, got superpowers and dumb costumes, and now, we’re all in a new universe. Is that everything?”, asked Casey.

“In a nutshell, yes.”, replied Angus.

“That still doesn’t answer why we’re here.”, said Kasey.

“I think I may have an idea. When the black goat intruded our game, he brought all of your souls with him. When we killed both of them, their souls probably had nowhere else to go but here.”, explained Angus.

“So, you saved us?”, asked Casey.

“Yes. We saved you.”

“Well, I think that’s enough mind-fuckery for one day. What now?”

“Well, we’ll be here for a few more hours until we fall asleep, and then, we have to get back to rebuilding society.”

“We’ll be here whenever we’re asleep, though, and we’re immortal! We can make up for all of the lost time!”, added Gregg excitedly.

“That sounds great! It’s too bad I’m stuck here forever, though.”, lamented Casey.

“At least you don’t have to worry about anything anymore. The town isn’t dying, and you don’t have to worry about supporting yourself. You can go out and do whatever you want! The drum set’s still in the party barn if you wanted to play.”, replied Mae.

“I could do that if Bea doesn’t mind.”

“Go ahead. All I ever did was push a button. I’m not really missing out on much.”, said Bea.

“So, did you guys want to do that?”, asked Casey.
“Yes!”, exclaimed Mae, “The band’s back together!”

For the rest of the night, they played music while all of the newcomers got to know each other. It was a great way to celebrate a long-fought victory.

Eventually, it was time to sleep, though.

“So, we’ll see you tomorrow night.”, said Mae.

“You got it.”, replied Casey.

Everyone said their goodbyes and went to find beds to sleep in. Soon enough, they were all asleep. When they woke up, it was time to address the next matter in building a new society, repopulation.

“I got the lab.”, said Bombshell as she placed the lab outside.

“So, how does this work exactly?”, asked Mae as she looked around at all of the machinery.

“Let’s text John.”, suggested Angus.

AD: John, can you explain ectobiology to us?

GT: Sure. It’s not too complicated, actually.

John then explained the process of combining ectoslime to create new lifeforms.

“Cap’n, cap’n, we can finally have kids!”, said Gregg with glee.

“Well, let’s try it out then.”, replied Angus. They retrieved ectoslime from Gregg and Angus.

“Can I push the button, please?!”, begged Gregg.

“Sure.”

“Wooo!” Gregg quickly pushed the button. The ectomachine randomly combined the genes of both Gregg and Angus and created a baby with them. The child was a fox, like Gregg, with red fur, like Angus. It was a boy.

“Oh, my god, he’s so adorable!”, screamed Gregg gleefully. He jumped around a bit to vent his excitement, but he soon realized this was a mistake when he slipped and fell on the metallic floor. He grabbed onto the ectomachine, and he accidentally pushed the button again.

Another baby was created, this time a female bear with blond fur.

“Uh…”, was all Angus could say.

“They’re twins!”, exclaimed Gregg, “We have twins! I mean, they don’t look the same, but still!”

Angus was still speechless, but to be honest, he was overjoyed that he would get to raise two children. He promised himself he would be better than his own parents. These two would get to live happy lives. Angus would make sure of it.

“Do you wanna have kids?”, asked Mae to Bea.

“Nah. Let’s give it a couple of years.”
“Alright, Gregg, can you go get them clothed and stuff while I stay here and make sure producing the rest of the babies goes okay?”, requested Angus.

“You got it, cap’n.”, agreed Gregg as he took the babies and left.

“Okay, let’s make the rest of the babies and give them out to the people. John said they could raise them fine, so I’m going to trust him on that.”

Thousands of babies were made and given out to the people of the new earth.

GT: I have the codes for all kinds of foods, supplies, and stores here. I think you’ll be especially grateful for the baby supplies.

AD: Thanks, we appreciate it.

GT: No problem. We like to make sure the new universes are set with everything they need. If you need anything, just ask, and we’ll probably have it already.

AD: I’ll be sure to keep that in mind.

GT: Sadly, we probably won’t talk too much after this. I have other universes to help. I’ll try to keep in touch, but you also have to keep in mind that I have to do the same with many other universes.

MB: That sucks. It was cool getting to talk to you and your friends.

GT: It was cool getting to meet all of you, too. I wish you luck in rebuilding, but I’m afraid this is going to be goodbye for now. I have things to do and another universe was already given to me, so I need to go do that.

MB: Thanks for everything. Goodbye.

GT: Goodbye.

The next few years were fairly eventful. Everyone continued to build, and eventually, giant cites were formed. Society was rebuilt into a peaceful and diverse community. It almost felt like life on Earth were it not for the many alien creatures.

Then, there was the matter of Naming Gregg and Angus’ children.

“Why is naming children so hard?”, whined Gregg.

“We also have to figure out who’s last name to take.”, added Angus.

“It doesn’t matter what name you give them. Most of us don’t even go by our real names.”, said Mae.

Gregg looked at the baby bear, who was asleep in a crib next to her brother, “Margaret.”

“Huh?”, said Angus.

“Let’s name her Margaret, like after Mae.”

Angus thought this over for a moment, “Okay. I’d be fine with that.”

“What? Are you sure?”, asked Mae.
“Yeah! This baby wouldn’t even exist if you hadn’t beat the black goat!”, assured Gregg.

“Well… I’d be honored.”

“That’s one out of the way, but what about him?”, asked Bea, pointing at the baby fox that was still without a name.

“How about… Casey?”, suggested Angus.

“Really?”, asked Gregg.

“I think he’d like it. It can be like a celebration of Casey being back. Besides, I just like the name.”

“Alright, yeah! Margaret and Casey! What about our last name?”

“I wouldn’t mind taking yours.”, offered Angus.

“I don’t know. Angus Lee just doesn’t sound right. Now, Gregg Delaney? That’s a name I can get behind.”

“So, is that what we’re going with?”, asked Angus.

“Yes. We are the Delaneys.”

“I guess that’s everything then. All that’s left is to arrange the wedding.”

“I’m so excited! I can’t wait!”

“Me, neither, bug.”

Soon, everyone had gone back to wearing their normal clothes. The god tier outfits were comfy, but they were incredibly tacky, and some of them were just weird. A few months later, the wedding came. It was a happy day for everyone. They held it in the dream bubble so everyone could see it. Many people were in tears by the end.

A few years later, Mae and Bea were sitting together for a nice, home-cooked meal on the anniversary of them gaining their freedom.

“I can’t believe it’s been four years already.”, said Mae, as she munched on her tacos.

“Me, either. It feels so good not to be trapped anymore. We can do anything we want. I’m so happy now. I get to be here with you, and my parents, and everyone.”

Mae was holding something under the table, “Bea, can I ask you something?”

“Sure. What is it?”

“Well, I was wondering…”, Mae’s voice trailed off.

“Come on, spit it out.”, urged Bea.

“I was wondering…”, Mae pulled the black box from under the table, “Would you marry me?”

Bea stared for a moment and sighed, which terrified Mae, but then, Bea pulled out her own black box, “Of course, you’d beat me to it.”
“Does that mean…”

“Yes. Yes, I will marry you.”

Mae began laughing, then crying. She reached over the table and hugged Bea, accidentally knocking over their plates when she did.

“You’re cleaning that up.”, said Bea in a deadpan tone.

“Yeah, yeah, whatever.”

The wedding came a few months later. Once again, there was plenty of crying. Gregg and Angus struggled to keep Margaret and Casey under control, being the hyperactive toddlers they were. Mae and Bea decided to continue the line of Borowskis rather than the Santellos.

Mae became an artist. With everything she had been through, she had tons of experiences to draw inspiration from. Her art wound up selling for millions, and she was known as one of the world’s best artists. This job also allowed her to stay at home with the child Bea and she decided to have, Emily. She was a crocodile with black scales.

Bea and Angus decided to start a therapist’s clinic. Angus dealt with the psychological side of therapy, while Bea focused more on relationships. This turned out to be a much-needed service to the war-torn peoples of Prospit and Derse.

Gregg became the stay-at-home dad until Margaret and Casey decided to move out. When they did move out, Gregg wasn’t sure what to do with himself. Eventually, he decided to pick up his guitar again, and he started messing around with writing music. He found that he enjoyed it immensely, and he decided to get Mae, Bea, and Angus back together for their own band. They were never as popular as the band in the dream bubble, but it gave Gregg something to do other than crimes or working a dead-end job.

Over the four years, Selmers had started a poetry society much like the one at the Possum Springs library, but this one was much larger. She managed to get the whole group into poetry writing. Some, like Mae and Gregg, were really bad, but it was still fun. Bombshell, surprisingly, was really into it. She even moved on to bigger writings. Selmers and her became respected authors, Selmers for her poems, and Bombshell for her fantasy and sci-fi novels.

Lori returned to her love of horror movies and taught herself how to do everything. With the help of Mae and the others, she was able to create her own independent short film, gaining her critical acclaim. She then went on to writing feature films. Her name became widespread throughout the world.

Germ led a simpler life. He stayed at home with his family, enjoying the time he had with them until they inevitably died. Sadly, there was no way to make them immortal, but at the very least, he could be with them until that time did come.

This harsh reality was also realized by Gregg and Angus with their children, but they held the same philosophy. Just spend as much time with them as possible and give them the best lives possible. They would also be there for their grandchildren when the time came.

Casey and the other alternate selves started up the band again. They played very often, which gave all of the people there something to look forward to on a daily basis. Kasey even joined in as a pianist. People from the new Earth even came to see their shows. It made Casey happy to be able to do something with his life rather than just rotting away in Possum Springs.
Candy decided to introduce the world to the idea of god. She knew what it was like to have god. It felt good, and even if she couldn’t find him anymore, she wanted others, if they chose, to feel that happiness as well. She opened a church and spread the teachings of the Bible.

Cayden became the head of the new Earth’s police force. His ability to see death allowed him to predict crimes before they happened as well as how to best deal with them. He became known throughout the world as a true hero.

Karen went on to become a doctor. She could heal anyone with her powers. She, too, became known as a hero by the world.

Nick continued to offer his services as a repairman. He found fulfillment in his job. It made him happy to be able to return to what felt normal to him. His breath powers also came in handy in many situations.

Darby, unlike Germ, didn’t bring her family with her when she entered the game. She did, however, know a lot about explosives. She joined the demolitionists, and soon, she had risen to the head of the whole operation. The variety of explosives Germ had given her allowed her to have the right bomb for almost any job. Germ later joined her once his family passed.

Edward, with his lust for adventure, decided to leave in search of new planets. He knew that eventually, they would run out of space on this planet, and they would need somewhere to move any excess people. Bombshell gave his phone a tracker, so she could go get him whenever he wished to return.

They all went on to lead fulfilling lives. They had earned it. After everything they had been through, they deserved it.

In the end, everyone was happy.

Chapter End Notes

Welp, this is it. This is the end of my story. It’s kind of sad to see it go, but I’m also happy I was able to finish it. I do have another nitw story in the works, but it’s not a crossover. I may begin posting that in the next few weeks, depending on how much I get done. This has been a great experience, and I hope it was for you, too. Thank you for all of the support that I’ve gotten. I appreciate it, really. Thank you for reading, and I’ll hopefully see you all soon.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!