Learn When to Quit

by LutiasKokopelli

Summary

*I thought I had warned you about that guy. “Don’t let him find out ANYTHING about you”, sounds familiar? … Oh, but that’s right! I forgot you NEVER listen. To you it was all just a game after all, wasn’t it?

* Hee hee hee. Let me give you a little tip then: the Game is a Lie.

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* Echo Flowers repeat what they hear, babbling back and forth to each other until their words become meaningless noise.

* What used to be the “truth”… soon becomes too distorted to appeal to anything you thought you knew.

* Never trust a flower. That’s one of the constants of this world.
After trying everything he could to stop time loops from ruining his life and universe, Sans has finally figured out the truth. As a last resort, he finds out that he has no more choice but to ask for help.

May 1st, 2016. Undertale has existed for half a year, and its fandom is raging at its full potential. But then, a Player disappears.

Notes

This is a reboot of an old fanfic I had started in 2016. Seeing how it seemed to please so many people, I'm gonna do my best to improve it! The first version had a lot of flaws story- and character-wise, so hopefully, this will get better this time. That being said... Whether you are a new or old reader, I hope you will enjoy the ride!

Here's a small note about the plot: I love things such as double-entendres and foreshadowing, so you better believe there's gonna be a lot of it. Also free indirect speech is way too much fun to play with so you've got one heck of a case of unreliable narrator in your hands, dudes.

Also, a small tip about how this story works: I use a lot of very specific formatting. So, you have a choice: for each chapter, you are provided with two links, that will just load the half of the AO3 page that you want to read. One half is a bunch of high-quality screenshots that contain the chapter in its originally intended formatting; the other is regular text, with the basic formatting that AO3 allows. It does its job, but it's not as beautiful (imo) as the original.

If you want to read the story with its original formatting but that AO3 won't load the images properly, I also provide you in every single chapter with links towards: 1) an online PDF version on Google Drive (which the screenshots are taken from), and 2) a link towards the tumblr post, where the chapter is also posted as screenshots. You can see the chapter masterlists in this Google Drive folder, or on Tumblr (computer only). If you're reading the screenshot chapters from a computer, the images may appear wider than you'd like. If so, you can enter window mode and reduce the width of your browser's window: the images should decrease in size as well without losing in quality.

See the end of the work for more notes
Act I, Scene 1.0

Learn When to Quit

— Act 1 —

Don’t Let Him Find Out

Scene 1.0

» Read the PDF version here! «

» Read on tumblr here! «

This is the main index where you can choose which way you wish to read the chapter.

Read via Screenshots Here (full formatting but may encounter loading issues)

Read Plain Text Here (formatting limited to what AO3 can do)
She’s still sleeping. Now is not the time! She’s in that stupid dark basement, and she’s sleeping! The story can only start when she decides to wake up.

... That’s enough waiting.

She woke up in a start.

Before she could ponder what exactly had pulled her sleep so swiftly, a more striking realization put a question out of her mind and monopolized her thoughts: *Where was she?*

The simple answer was, a pitch black cellar; the one thing that went with was, *definitely not a place I know.*

A lot of stories are full of clichés. She had read novels, watched a lot of movies, and when the situation was taking such a big part in her life, even if at first not been particularly meaning to, after some knowledge of tropes and the genre-savvy attitude had become second nature to her.

So what, now? Well, the situation she was standing in one could say, a pretty reoccurring cliché.

She had no remembrance of ever walking in. Click
There were no windows, no vents, and the door available was locked. Cliché.

Her first reflex was to freak out for an amount of time that would have trouble calculating retrospectively, given the definition when you reach the state of a panic attack. But lose your grip on reality as well as any notion of time passing. The entire experience felt surreal because of pure nonsensicality (she clearly remembered spending a Sunday afternoon chatting online and locked in her bedroom, so how did she even arrive here to begin with? But still. That was cliché.

When she managed to come back to her senses and realized that panicking was going nowhere, she decided to weigh the options in order to actually calculate her next step in a smart way. Cliché.

The first conclusion anyone with a minimum of sense could muster at this point, was that she somehow had been kidnapped, and that she probably wouldn’t see time before her captor(s) came back. In just a story she knew, this would be the moment the protagonist would switch to their badass mode and make an escape. Cliché.

She was not the protagonist of a stupid action movie, and she had no ‘badass mode’, though. She would not be blowing the entire building up and putting on a
blowing the entire building up and putting on so much smoke while walking towards an imaginary camera because she too cool to give a single look at what she would be seeing.

And yet, she quickly found out with great shock that in the end, maybe she was still able to do something as she still had her cell phone in the back pocket of her pants. Granted, there was no reception in the room, so any call for help was out of the question; but still, what was supposed to be the first thing kidnappers took as they escaped with their victims as soon as they had the chance?

Besides, she was not even roped or tied to anything. If only she were able to pick the lock (a skill she, unfortunately, did not master), she would have easily been able to escape the very least from this room. Maybe her captors were so stupid and she would have found actual freedom beyond the door, if she indeed managed to escape. But from what she had seen until this point, it seemed whatever mistakes they made so far didn’t put them very high on her personal Scale of Credibility.

That being said, even if her phone could not be used to contact one of her relatives or the police, the way she used technology led to purely brilliant results. She used it literally, as her phone’s torchlight immediately became a life savior in helping her figure out a little more about the room she had been trapped in. And
she find a lot of stuff her kidnappers would probably preferred keeping away from her.

Whoever it was that had kidnapped her, they terrified her. Part of her would be almost pitying her life weren’t potentially on the line depending on plans they had for her once they would come back.

So, now that she had the means to rediscover with her eyes, she recapped. She had been unconscious for some time, and when she woke up, she was lying on a green jangling couch. Now that she was armed with the phone’s dim light, she looked at the ceiling and realized that there were big neon lights; she immediately looked for the switch, but after it was found, she was disappointed to realize that flipping it up and down was useless.

... Apparently the lights were out of order. Just how...

After some wandering about with her phone as a light, she found that besides the tiled floor and blur of blue there were a lot of littering pieces of random maps on the corners, a giant curtain in the furthest part of the room that was covering some kind of mysterious entity; a giant desk. This last detail was what focused the rest of her attention after that point, since she figured it was the only thing that could give her relevant hints. The desk was buried under piles of random papers...
notes, and although she had no idea what the written calculations were about, she assumed they were to be parts of some kind of blueprints. She soon discovered the desk lamp, but then again, trying to turn it on had not worked at all. That was when she saw that instead of a lightbulb, a torchlight had been taped on top of the lamp. After detaching it and trying to flip its switch, she hummed in satisfaction: finally something that worked the way she wanted it in this room. Although she did not question it much further, the idea of a flashlight being strapped to a desk lamp was a remote flashes of recognition, as if she had already encountered such situation somewhere before. It was possible it was just a coincidence, though. Nothing to worry about.

To her relief, she could now turn off her phone and battery, and thanks to this new flashlight’s power, her ability to investigate the surroundings became more efficient. It wasn’t extraordinary, but it was much better than her phone, since at least it had a longer range.

Still... She was not done yet with the desk. Indeed, finally she found, wait for it, a computer. Her kidnappers had left her all alone, without support, with a flipping computer right under her nose. A-
that one looked ancient, but still. Whatever little she still held for their kidnapping skills quickly evaporated at that moment.

Then again, when she tried to switch it on, obviously not respond either. None of the electric equipment could be turned on, so she guessed that there might be a blackout in the building, and that maybe the room had been left alone without supervision was being captors went to wherever the main generator was. Could fix a problem they had clearly not anticipated.

How long had it been since she woke up? It was hard to say, but maybe it was around ten to twenty minutes. Pretty long time to leave a captive unattended. Then again, from what she had seen, these guys had no idea what they were doing. She could probably keep herself around a little bit more. It was their fault for leaving her alone with all the material she needed to do so, actually.

The desk had a certain number of drawers. Decided to open the one on the far left, strategically intending to go through them one after the other in a simple order.

In the first drawer, she found books... She thought, an album, too. When she opened it on the first page, found a small photograph that hadn’t been properly protected inside of the album and was probably there just to
inside of the album and was probably there just to keep it from being damaged. It was pretty small, around the size of a Polaroid, so she approached her hand so she could see it and bring it closer...

Hey, wouldn’t it be a lot more fun if this was the exact moment he came back?

She heard some ruffling at the door. Then went the sound of a key rummaging through the lock.

They were back.

Not even bothering to close the drawer, she immediately turned around and looked for the safest place. Hopefully the giant curtain would do. At least long enough for her to find a more permanent solution.

The curtain ruffled and waved after her path. After making sure that she could keep an eye on the exit in the room, she turned the flashlight off. The door opened.

To her surprise, the place right outside the door was as dark as the room she was in. That helped herself less noticeable by hiding in the dark, but meant that she would be completely blind as well. She locked her eyes in the direction of the door, trying to form a mental image of the surroundings and the different objects in the room, for lack of being able to keep sight of...
in the room, for lack of being able to keep sight of

Well, well, now this is getting interesting and not
Maybe it was worth the wait, after all. Just maybe
She heard footsteps entering the room. They were
and quiet at first, almost as if whoever they be
was trying to avoid making too much noise.
She heard them stop for a few seconds. Then she
heard one of her captors’ voice.

“... oh boy. uh... hey, kid?” they called out to no
in particular. “i take it you woke up? sorry, i
should’ve prepared a note or something.”

That appeared to be a man, but there was a strang
in his voice that puzzled her deeply. It sounded as
his voice was being muffled by something, but she
quite put her finger on it and it didn’t really stri
the most accurate explanation.

Given the manner the sound of his voice came
irregular volumes, she realized that he had to be
his head in multiple directions and looking for her.

Which meant that he hadn’t found her yet.

“look, i probably spooked ya pretty badly en
but... i know you’re still here, and i won’t take
to find you, so, you can come out right now
and that’s the sincerest.
save us both the trouble.”

Ha. He was already admitting defeat. That would

“i’m sure you have a lot of questions, right, which is pretty convenient, ’cause i have all answers to give ya. we can just sit down and have a nice chat. no pressure. i mean, i know you think that this situation’s way too weird and all, but you’re not in danger, a’right?”

Damn right I’m not in danger, she thought, rolling her eyes in contempt. She almost hated his disbelieving look, but she managed to stop herself from doing that when she immediately realized that any irrelevant act would have given away her position. Still, though, was that guy stupid? The heck would you have kidnapped me, dumped me and then hugged me?

To give me a hug?

She tried to ignore the gullibility and foolishness of his words, instead focusing on how to take advantage of this situation. She could clearly hear his footsteps and looked out the window. He couldn’t locate her, but that was because she was moving or making any sounds. Yet.

She clearly remembered where the door was, clearly remembered that she had not heard him coming. Which meant that if she could find just the right way...
time and space...
All she had to do was assess a few distances and try. She would be patient. She would wait. And then she would seize the moment.
The footsteps were now not too far from her, around five to ten feet away; but they were pretty close to the door. If she remembered right the dispositi—
room, he had to be around the desk. Soon... But then he stopped walking, and silence engulfed her room and left her in total blindness. She waited, wondering what he was doing since anywhere near her to begin wi—
Something grabbed her arm.

“welp. found you.”

She screamed. She yanked her arm away from him in a sudden and violent movement that seemed to have left him stunned for a second. Part of her was surprised by how easy it had appeared to be in comparison with her — she thought she heard him wince in surprise and perhaps taking a few steps back, when she had raised and arm flying around without warning. However, that part of her went completely unnoticed under her usual guidance and control.
the others when adrenaline enhanced her reflexes blinded her thoughts.

Hardly a second after her arm was freed, she to again. Turning towards him swiftly, she pressed and brandished the flashlight at him like a deadly. She immediately heard an additional grunt stranger, as he was momentarily blinded by the unexpected Powerful Beam. It’s super effective!

... Or not. But it’s enough for the stupid girl to victory. What’s she thinking, that she’s the hero up the bad guys or that she’ll make a brilliant with that stupid stick? Besides, this is basically...

But who am I to judge, eh?

*Ha, take that!* she mentally grinned. *Next time
leave dangerous weapons lying around, you just* Although he took a few more steps back and right by his desk, and although he kept rubbing with his left hand for a few more seconds, the vic harmless attack had a rather quick adaptation to brightness of his surroundings. And as soon as he his pale arm, the girl couldn’t help but slightly lo as well, now facing the stranger with a blank exp

“... heh. already throwin’ in the *spotlights*, he chuckled lightly. “I didn’t realize you’d w
get enlightened on the truth so soon. ‘spite, since, uh. you didn’t seem so interested in a brilliant idea a minute ago.”

Upon realizing who it was... Actually, what really her was her complete lack of reaction, in fact. You know, it’s that very specific state of mind that you realize that everybody has their own quota of things that can happen to them, and that the limit weirdness they can handle at a time is very pertinent specific to each individual. Once you’ve got past you just reach that point where practically nothing surprise you anymore, if only temporarily. So when your limit is indeed crossed by the cruelty you just stand there, mouth slightly agape, staring put you in this state and mentally nodding in the normal’ gesture, because it would require too much your neurons to process an explanation or just my energy to say that this is not supposed to happen.

So yeah, if you were following this train of thought the state our little pseudo-protagonist was in.

“a’right, maybe the last one was a bit of a stretch. He rolled his eyes and shrugged overdramatically. Then he paused and his grin expanded. “but tell me it completely left ya in the dark, eh
... Aaand he threw the finger gun. Damn it.

He finally seemed to notice that the teenage girl was not reacting at all. No laughs, no smiles, not even a blink. Only... well, that same face of utter shock as when she first entered. Except that by that time she had stepped back until she bumped into the wall behind her, and couldn’t go any further, and that now she appeared to be holding on to it for dear life.

When he saw her drop the flashlight, he realized then that time, the girl might have just completely dissolved from reality for a minute or two.

Well, by now I guess it should be someone else to say something along the lines of: “Sans, I think you broke the human.”

“uh... hello? did your power... black out, too...”

He seemed a little desperate for an answer, by the way he asked. Whether positive or negative. Nevertheless, he still obtained none.

Yeah, even you can see that this one was the, hands off, all, buddy.

“... ugh. too soon for puns, got it.” He buried his hands further into his pockets and seemed to hide his head into his shoulders, as he looked at...
his head into his shoulders, as he looked away in disappointment and mumbled under his breath: "tough crowd."

She quickly stared at what appeared to be a living silhouette, rising and lowering repeatedly her gaze down to the details she could perceive. Despite his still being much hidden in the distant shadows, far away a silly little Trustworthy Flashlight’s brightness now was not focused on his face anymore, she immediately noticed the trademark blue hoodie that she could recognize anywhere. And his short pants. And the bones. She did not want to focus on the bones. But she immediately realized that she perfectly knew who this guy looked like.

Well, rather, who this guy looked like.

She couldn’t help but smile awkwardly. She hated that she couldn’t understand what was going on. Nervous didn’t really help, but she couldn’t stop them from appearing on her face whenever she was tense and anxious. And especially when she was mocking herself for starting to seriously consider some dumb and option that was just not possible.

This, simply, was not Sans. There basically was some random pile of pixels from a simple video, could not magically all of a sudden become corporeal and sentient and be facing her right now in the four di
sentient and be facing her right now in the four directions of space and time. She would not discuss that science as it was simply out of the question.

Whoever she was facing right now was just. Not. Undertale was not. Real.

She had no idea why that random creepy guy would try and make her to think otherwise, though. Well, she had a few hypotheses, but none of them could conveniently justify all the trouble the red noodle guy had come into just to order everything in place to the slightest details. That was necessary if he wanted anything convincing of course, but... Just, what was that for?

Well, on second thought, no matter what real explanation she could think of, that whole mess would have been unnecessarily overcomplicated and frustrating to deal with in comparison with the results they would potentially produce anyway. For an instant she almost considered playing along; she actually fell into his trap, and improvising some kind of ‘roleplay’ or something out of pity, but she quickly forgot that uneasy about it. She had been kidnapped after all, and there was no room for jokes with your kidnapper.

And yet, although she had quickly bent down to check the flashlight she had let fall on the floor at some point, she would not raise her arm back and try to cover herself with its light once again. Nah, his face was very
“... Ha. That was a really good impression of dead. I eventually uttered in a voice that sounded less confident than she had intended to. “Also, honestly, I’d almost buy it if it weren’t for a few things. Like, you know. The fact that he’s not real. Just

There was no worded response from Definitely. She thought she might have heard a distant out laughter, but it stopped abruptly and she hadn’t move. He was still standing in the shadows, staring with an unreadable total lack of expression, both deeply buried into his pockets.

Well, when his whole face was engulfed in the darkness, it was quite difficult to distinguish it clearly anyway. I thought she could see that little glimmer of a cold, slightly embarrassed “... excuse me, what?” in his pupils—even though she completely ignored him. (can’t be pupils, it’s just a costume! He probably has LEDs or something like that).

“The computer is new, uh? I-I’ve never seen its like... unless it’s supposed to be Papyrus’s. And... there was only one big machine at most

one in the back, I mean, all the others over the just decoys, right? O-oh, and the thing I was slept on, too. It’s the green couch, isn’t it? W-well, to it wasn’t supposed to be in this room.” She then cross her arms and puff out her chest as an attempt to increase her confidence. The effectiveness of the act was debatable. “So. See? If y-you wanted to think that I’d somehow got drawn into the game whatever, you got another thing coming.”

For at least a good dozen seconds, the guy simply her in disbelief, not knowing how to react. Was any way to properly react? He wondered.

He refused to regard this as a possibility at first, for...

... oh. oh god she’s serious.

He had to muster all his remaining energy in objective of not openly bursting out laughing at

He would not be able to regain a straight face and he needed to get serious at some point. But—

Yeah, pretty much feeling you there, buddy. I reached the jackpot.

However, the only thing that girl was able to see current spot was that Definitely-Not-Sans had decided to get on the move, muffling what sou
some kind of (almost) amused chuckle while shrugging, maybe. It was really hard to see what she was doing in the dark, but she preferred that rather than that torchlight back at him.

He wondered whether he should directly tell her of it with it and let her realize on her own. But second option seemed to present itself as potentially unstable (and arguably hilarious) she could she seemed to not even remember that it happened. Granted, she had just seen him for less seconds and then fainted immediately, so there wasn’t much to remember anyway.

Either way, he wasn’t willing to reiterate the experience. Besides, maybe doing things her way would give opportunity to extract some information from her if she was lucky enough. He was pretty curious about things himself.

He would let her deduce the truth at her own pace. At least, he would try.

Still, he feared that this would take a while.

“heh... ok wow. i see you DO know that game details. i’ll admit, i’m impressed.” He chuckled
little more, then gave a nod towards the familiar sofa on his right side. “you’re pretty observant, that’s the couch from the living room. put it here a few weeks ago.”

When she lent another glance at the sofa, she could realize that it did look a lot like the one from the

But of course the stupid girl had to guide the focus towards the oh-so-fascinating piece of furniture, already inspected mere minutes ago anyway as the skeleton without surveillance, if only for a freaking second. I kinda hoped at some point… we’ll have to cope with the Ultimate Idiot kind. not everything can be perfect, huh?

Still. How much do you wanna bet this is gonna go on her within the next seconds?

And indeed, as soon as her eyes strayed away from the sound of a few calm footsteps suddenly caught attention from behind, and when she turned back and Trusty Torch towards the spot where he was standing until then, she noticed he wasn’t there nor anywhere nearby. Instead, she found him a few later lying lazily on the couch, his arms idly stretched out, its soft greenish back as he used his hands as pillows and grinned trollesquely (wait no it’s just... Well, role-playing all along, wasn’t he?
He sure was enjoying this.

... *Still, how the heck did he get there so quickly?*

The Trusty Torch started to shake and the shadow room followed, dancing around its cold immaculately.

“By the way, uh, wow. You really must’ve put a lot of effort into making all this. And I don’t know that much about time travel mind-screws, but, those blue balls are quite convincing. You really must be a hails fan, aren’t you?” She chuckled shakily, unconvinced.

“Can I just ask you, uh, why you did all this extra stuff? You do realize this is technically a kidnapping, right?”

She was trying to take it lightly and make it sound like a joke, but it felt obvious that it definitely wasn’t. This masquerade had been lasting for long enough that all this really was starting to get on her nerves. She simply could not understand. This entire situation made no sense whatsoever, this place was scaring her out although she was still sort of glad. The guy disguised as a skeleton was keeping some sort of tension between them because that really was the last thing she could be getting to complete the scheme even if those were definitely not real bones—

Oh gosh, she was starting to hyperventilate again...
getting harder to hold the stupid stick, as if it was made of lead. Viscous and wet lead.
... Wait, no, the humidity was just the cold sweat strange here. Hahaha.

“... hey. you alright kiddo?”

It felt odd that he genuinely seemed slightly concerned, even if he was good at hiding it on his face (dude obviously wearing a mask, so of course his entire hidden). But no, his tone could not fool anyone picked on the nervousness surrounding her.

He did not particularly care about that stranger didn’t even know that kid to begin with); but still, anyone in that state was concerning enough as it was.

He was squishing the sofa’s cushions in his bones as if he were on the verge of rushing towards were to collapse because of her shaky pale legs.

Interestingly, it appeared that this last observation pushed her to take a step back and answer ah and winded voice as soon as she caught her breath.

She stiffened in an attempt to regain control of her

“As alright as could any normal person be when find themselves trapped in a dark locked room being kidnapped by a lunatic dressed like Under the most memetic and creepy-yet-popular charac which was very close this game was way more far out.
whichever psychopathic reasons you found, she retorted bitterly with a desperate sarcasm…

... Well, if she still had enough energy for sarcasm, the case probably wasn’t *that* worrying after all. Still...

“ha, yeah, right… sorry for leavin’ you all a the dark. I thought I could leave for a bit a to do something about the blackout while you a out, but I guess my little experiment might a done a bit more damage than I thought... heh.”

For a short instant, he seemed to actually hesitate were measuring his words and trying carefully the exact ones. Though it seemed that beyond the words, their repercussions were what truly bothed She clearly was not doing nearly as fine as he would have preferred, but she just… *had* to hear the truth point, right? Normally, he would not have bothered something like this— especially because, at least beginning, this had some nice potential as joker and he wondered whether she would keep finding to ‘prove’ that he weren’t real even while she w more about this world. However… he remembered she had first reacted, and that had *not* been pret

He feared that if he stopped caring about this issue rolled with things as they were, the moment e
would click in her mind would just so happen to be the worst possible moment. Namely, the moment she found some irrefutable evidence that would let her have everything all at once—just like the moment when they met for the first time. She had freaked out to the point where she fainted and had no later recollection whatsoever about that night. After all, she could totally do it again. So... Baby said...

“i’ve been using that basement a lot, y’know. i’ve been working on some pretty... other stuff, recently. and it all allowed you to get in the end. you’d find it pretty fantastic if you tried to believe it and stopped waving that machine around at random. so uh, guess you could say it’s time to see the light, now. ain’t i right...?”

... Seriously, is that all you’ve got? Even I can tell this pun was objectively lame.

She merely glared at him and pouted in frustration. Her grip on the torchlight tightened. That guy’s attitude was starting to annoy her to such extent, she was starting to forget her instinctive feeling of dread. She was completely incapable of watching him without being found whimpering in a corner as soon...
without being found whimpering in a corner as so first bits of gore appeared and as a consequence she ever watched any, but anybody could easily deduce dark locked basements and masked suspiciously never a good match; the fact that she was starting her annoyance more credit than that primal feeling pretty talkative fact on its own.

Part of her almost wanted him to shift to the ‘keep part and start to explain what was going on. That would have been less frustrating than watching pseudo-roleplaying by sitting on the couch and meaningless ‘pranks’ that weren’t even supposed funny to the slightest.

“Speaking of getting me here, I am wondering: who I mean, if it has anything to do with Undertale, it’s not like I could be the ‘best fan you could ever found’ or some other stupid thing like that. I never even played the game in the first place.

For some reason, she almost felt that guy’s overly silence the very instant she had uttered that last She was not completely sure why, but it was almost as if she had just sensed his sudden tension with needing to turn her eyes and watch it on his face of the distance between them.

And even though she simply dismissed this feel
And even though she simply dismissed this feeling as mere coincidence or some kind of ‘predictability’ and had intuited in his excessively silent reaction, she was slightly taken aback by how seriously he seemed to take that revelation, feeling this rising... was this coupled with anger? Or both?

The skeleton’s grip on the sofa tightened once more, but this time, it was for a completely different reason.

“Wait. Seriously?” he uttered as calmly as he could, though probably a little too fast and somberly.

It was the first time she really paid attention, but she had noticed that there was something peculiar about the timbre in his voice. Until now, she had assumed that it was only due to the fact that he had to be some sort of latex mask after all, this was only possibility, right?) had to be somewhat muted in her words, but this time... She couldn’t help but notice that this time it really had sounded even stranger than before.

If it really had been Sans in one of his in-game deaths, she could have almost guessed that he would use some capitals in his speech, for once. And once he had learned fast enough through the fandom that that monster, proper capitalization was never a good choice.

*Good thing that option is definitely out of the
“Yeah!” she shrugged obliviously. “Honestly, so much at video games, you have no idea. I’ve been wondering if there was something like a record for that. I’m not kidding, even if I want to play that game, I wouldn’t even survive five minutes.”

And there came back that exact same awkward he was uncomfortably staring at her without even the slightest from his seat, narrowing and twitching which from that distance could only be dist through what was supposed to mimic a pair of eyes. With that giant smile stuck on his mask, it was deci her what the expression on his real face could he really seemed to be deeply confused, if not...

The small lights in his eye-sockets darkened as he her with always more intensity. That brat obvious very specific facts about what seemed to be ba details that most of the common players would he definitely overlooked without question, and yet she first claimed that she had nothing to do with but now she even had the nerve to...

So this was how things were. This all made so much more sense now. Of course could be dumb enough to stay so oblivious for th...
Just what kind of human could be so smart and detail-oriented that they would remember and point out details that he would have not noticed them himself near the end of the game and yet be so dense that she wouldn’t even acknowledge the most obvious detail that was lying right under her nose?

It was all so clear now. She already knew. She already knew for some time now and she had been playing dumb all along. This was such evil brilliance. He had to hand it to her. She had managed to fool him for much longer than he had expected. Thankfully, she had made a fatal--err, fatal mistake that immediately exposed her lies.

Well, if this was the way things had started, then it was just as well play pretend along with her, huh. He didn’t need to be more careful with his words and sit on the edge of his seat, focus and attention to hers, but he could always try to squeeze juicy answers out of her in the process.

“well, maybe. but... you must have at least told her something by some point, right?” he asked warily. “you were going to start a very special run, at that. Weren’t you?”

She would eventually spill the beans. She had to. Or if she was not necessarily have to be a completely rotten apple. Or if she was, she seemed to be talkative enough that her words would betray her at some point. All he had to do was make her talk until the truth came out by itself.
Her innocent tone and stupid attitude had been bothering him at first, but now that he knew that it was just that this was only making him sick. What could be underneath? Part of him dreaded to find out.

“Well, yeah, I was about to play it since my mum kept trying to make me for the past few weeks somehow I ended up here before I could actually start. So nope, I technically never played them. She turned her eyes towards him and squinted into a dark glare before continuing. “I wonder who’s at fault for dragging me away from my laptop.

Both his eye-sockets twitched once, very furtively at the same time; but besides that, he had remained still for what felt like whole minutes now. And even his last gesture had been subtle and she reasoned latex masks could probably not make that sort of. So she decided that it had to be her imagination.

“Hey, are you alright?” She mockingly repeated words he had previously used to address her. She had been in a similar state. “You almost looked like you’re about to collapse or something.” She wasn’t even hiding her nervous yet genuinely said chuckle. “Seriously, I’m the one who was kidnap here. Are you gonna explain what’s going on or
He paused, tensely running a white hand along his slow burying his eyes into his fingers, as to try some kind of nausea. The rubbing let out a little sound that gracefully put the teenager even unease, as she unconsciously stepped back and into the wall once again. Did latex make that sort when you rubbed it...?

... And wait a minute. Did she just see his mask by No. No-no-no. Not possible. That didn’t happen. Her fear and tension were just playing tricks on her.

“n... never mind. let’s just... change the subject. how do you happen to know that much about uh, game, then? you sure seem to know an awful lot for someone who allegedly never touched it.”

Her eyes suddenly widened in what would seem genuine surprise, but some discreet eerie sparks twinkled in the corners of her flickering eyelids.

“Oh yeah, sure, that’s more like the kidnapping to ask the questions and ignore mine.” she sneered exasperatedly, rolling her eyes in growing annoyance.

“Are you kidding? You kidnap me and then all is start some random cosplay and lie in that and such, and now you’re just expecting me about my hobbies just like we’re talking about weather around a cup of tea!”
weather around a cup of tea?
She crossed her arms and huffed tensely. Her patience really started to reach its limit now, and *that* was something. But seriously, that was just starting to be *way too much* weirdness for her standards.

“Well, sorry to disappoint, but I’m not here for banter. I want an explanation, and I’m gonna get it.”

He sighed in anticipation, but locked his white light and spied on each of her movements and expressions. She didn’t even give him a glare, because she already knew that whatever he could say, she wouldn’t be convinced with it anyway. She didn’t even care whether or not he was still there watching her; if he wasn’t getting an important part, then she would be. There was only so much waiting could do. Once the right opportunity was in front of her, she knew there was time to *get moving*.

Starting with the first logical conclusion she could think about, she looked around and brandished her tools in various directions, sometimes gesturing some half-baked lines as she was trying to figure out some sort of the puzzle. Then she started to approach the desk again, tossing some random blueprints and sheets before replacing them approximately in the same mess as before. Yet, she seemed to fail to find whatever she had in mind. But her gestures nevertheless resumed the cycle at a faster pace, and she paced towards more locations in the lab, now that she was sure that the answers were somewhere in this mess.
and she paced towards more locations in the
investigate more thoroughly.

Well isn’t that the face of one big desperate girl.
The way she keeps digging her own grave is
baffling. In a sort of mesmerizing way, almost
such mixture between powerful observation so
incredible foolishness really exist?

“what are you looking for?” he eventually
tiredly, but with what seemed to be some little
of curiosity and amusement. No way this was
not to be reckoned with, this now really was pure stu.
She wouldn’t find anything dangerous in there.

“The camera.” she answered immediately, not
turning her eyes towards him. “You can’t be a
kidnapper, you made way too many mistakes
this act is just preposterous. So this is some
prank, right? There’s a camera somewhere in
room, recording us right now, and when you
the file we’ll become internet famous or what?

... Excuse me?

“You know, unless you’re using an infrared cam
don’t think anyone’s gonna see much on the in
but I’ll admit, keeping the lights out were a good
to better hide your equipment and put the
atmosphere, so maybe you’re not complet
amateur. What are you looking for, YouTube(view)?

Well... I’m sure the result must be hilarious, maybe you did make a safe bet with that. It’s easy to make Undertale videos viral.”

Definitely-Not-Sans seemed to widen his eyes in surprise, for once. Though he still was obviously amused by all her (indeed) pretty much hilarious gestures here and there, he just... The way she managed her performance sound so genuine despite the sheer absurdities she was uttering was simply beyond belief...

“... ok, wow. so you really are of the conspiracy theory type, huh?”

“Well, usually not that much, but it’s not like there were many other options left.” She had stopped her search for a few seconds, only to turn to him and shine that big cocky smirk that was supposed to be sarcastic... but it really just looked pathetic.

“haha. yeah. you’re right. t’s not like there was an obvious and simple option that it could all be

Now staring at the desk and the things lying messily on it, she opened her mouth to confirm in the most and cynical tone she could get— but she never had time to actually say anything.
Something had caught her shoulder from her back. The grip felt so strong and _done_.

“just kidding. it's high time you get real, kid.”

That voice, that _same voice_ that was coming secretly from the couch, was now sounding right from behind her back. She shivered and, as a reflex, looked over her shoulder—

But then she met in the dim light, hardly a foot away from her eyes, something that was _definitely not_ a late-night hazing stunt. His left eye was still flickering an eerie blue, continuing to search the depths of his eye socket. The light magically split second later, but its striking impression remained. His stuck and still giant smirk sliced his whole face; somehow seemed to keep enlarging itself into an edgy forced grin.

**Bones.**

It was real. Oh God this was real. This was Sans and he was staring at her and he looked _so done_ and every last thing she had said about him and the game he had heard him talk about he was real. Her eye fell on that white hand still set upon her shoulder, its holes and its so fragile yet phalanges and its iron grip on her flesh and the cold metal on her skin.

She let out a sudden hysterical cry, but she couldn't
She’s still sleeping. Now is not the time! She’s alone in that stupid dark basement, and she’s
hear it herself. She didn’t even feel her vibrating chords, although they were shaking and struggling in an attempt to escape it, threatening to be torn at any instant.

The entire room started to turn around her at an increasingly growing speed, while flickering lights and orange and dim yellow in pitch black and skulls and claws on her back and the dark ceiling and low yells all rising in unison like distorted laughs of...

... She passed out. *Again.*

Sans watched with bewilderment at what had become an unconscious body that had fallen down a tiled floor, without any warning and apparently not to move again for a while. He started to tremble in exasperation as his left hand upon his skull, slowly covering his eye-sockets as the darkness slowly darkening. He tried to let out a reasonably controlled sigh so as to stay calm, but he could feel his patience run out...

... **seriously?**
sleeping. I guess the story can only start when she decides to wake up…

… That’s enough waiting.

She woke up in a start.

Before she could ponder what exactly had pulled her out of her sleep so swiftly, a more striking realization pushed this question out of her mind and monopolized her neurons: Where was she?

The simple answer was, a pitch black cellar; the one she went with was, definitely not a place I know.

A lot of stories are full of clichés. She had read a lot of novels, watched a lot of movies, and when the internet was taking such a big part in her life, even if at first she had not been particularly meaning to, after some point the knowledge of tropes and the genre-savvy attitude just became second nature to her.

So what, now? Well, the situation she was standing in was, one could say, a pretty reoccurring cliché.

She had no remembrance of ever walking in. Cliché.

There were no windows, no vents, and the only door available was locked. Cliché.

Her first reflex was to freak out for an amount of time she would have trouble calculating retrospectively, since by definition when you reach the state of a panic attack, you lose your grip on reality as well as any notion of time passing. The entire experience felt surreal because of its pure nonsensicality (she clearly remembered spending her Sunday afternoon chatting online and locked inside her bedroom, so how did she even arrive here to begin with?), but still. That was cliché.

When she managed to come back to her senses and realize that panicking was going nowhere, she decided to ponder her options in order to actually calculate her next move in a smart way. Cliché.

The first conclusion anyone with a minimum of common sense could muster at this point, was that she had somehow been kidnapped, and that she probably had little time before her captor(s) came back. In just about any story she knew, this would be the moment the protagonist would switch to their badass mode and make a brilliant escape. Cliché.
She was not the protagonist of a stupid action movie and she had no ‘badass mode’, though. She would not leave by blowing the entire building up and putting on sunglasses while walking towards an imaginary camera because she’d be too cool to give a single look at what she would’ve done.

And yet, she quickly found out with great shock and awe that in the end, maybe she was still able to do something: she still had her cell phone in the back pocket of her jeans. Granted, there was no reception in the room, so trying to call for help was out of the question; but still, wasn’t that supposed to be the first thing kidnappers took away from their victims as soon as they had the chance?

Besides, she was not even roped or tied to any extent! If only she were able to pick the lock (a skill she, sadly, did not master), she would have easily been able to escape, at the very least from this room. Maybe her captors were not that stupid and she would have found actual obstacles beyond the door, if she indeed managed to open it; but from what she had seen until this point, all the mistakes they made so far didn’t put them very high up on her personal Scale of Credibility.

That being said, even if her phone could not be used to call one of her relatives or the police, the wonders of technology led to purely brilliant results. Sometimes literally, as her phone’s torchlight immediately became a life savior in helping her figure out a little more details about the room she had been trapped in. And dang, did she find a lot of stuff her kidnappers would probably have preferred keeping away from her.

Whoever it was that had kidnapped her, they terribly sucked at their job. Part of her would be almost pitying them, if her life weren’t potentially on the line depending on which plans they had for her once they would come back.

So, now that she had the means to rediscover the room with her eyes, she recapped. She had been unconscious for some time, and when she woke up, she was lying on an old green jangling couch. Now that she was armed with her phone’s dim light, she looked at the ceiling and noticed that there were big neon lights; she immediately searched for the switch, but after it was found, she was disappointed to realize that flipping it up and down was useless.

… Apparently the lights were out of order. Just her luck.

After some wandering about with her phone as guidance, she found that besides the tiled floor and bluish walls, there were a lot of littering pieces of random machinery in the corners, a giant curtain in the furthest part of the room that was covering some kind of mysterious engine, and a giant desk. This last detail was what focused the entirety of her attention after that point, since she figured that it was the only thing that could give her relevant hints.
The desk was buried under piles of random papers and notes, and although she had no idea what the writings and calculations were about, she assumed they were supposed to be parts of some kind of blueprints. She soon noticed a desk lamp, but then again, trying to turn it on had no effect at all. That was when she saw that instead of a lightbulb, a torchlight had been taped on top of the lamp. After detaching it and trying to flip its switch, she smirked and hummed in satisfaction: finally something worked the way she wanted it in this room.

Although she did not question it much further, the image of a flashlight being strapped to a desk lamp sent her remote flashes of recognition, as if she had already heard of such situation somewhere before. It was probably a coincidence, though. Nothing to worry about.

To her relief, she could now turn off her phone and save its battery, and thanks to this new flashlight’s powerful beam, her ability to investigate the surroundings became much more efficient. It wasn’t extraordinary, but it was definitely much better than her phone, since at least it had a wider and longer range.

Still… She was not done yet with the desk.

Indeed, finally she found, wait for it, a computer.

Her kidnappers had left her all alone, without supervision, with a flipping computer right under her nose. Admittedly that one looked ancient, but still. Whatever little esteem she still held for their kidnapping skills quickly evaporated at that moment.

Then again, when she tried to switch it on, obviously, it did not respond either. None of the electric equipment could be turned on, so she guessed that there might be a general blackout in the building, and that maybe the reason she had been left alone without supervision was because her captors went to wherever the main generator was so they could fix a problem they had clearly not anticipated.

How long had it been since she woke up? It was hard to tell, but maybe it was around ten to twenty minutes by now. Pretty long time to leave a captive unattended.

Then again, from what she had seen, these guys had no idea what they were doing. She could probably keep nosing around a little bit more. It was their fault for leaving her alone with all the material she needed to do so, after all.

The desk had a certain number of drawers. Deciding she had nothing better to do for the moment, she began to open the one on the far left, strategically intending to open them one after the other in a simple order.

In the first drawer, she found books… She thought she saw an album, too. When she opened it on the first page, she found a small photograph that hadn’t been properly put inside of the album and
was probably there just to prevent it from being damaged. It was pretty small, around the size of a Polaroid, so she approached her hand so she could lift it and bring it closer.

Hey, wouldn’t it be a lot more fun if *this* was the exact moment he came back?

She heard some ruffling at the door. Then went the tingling sound of a key rummaging through the lock.

They were back.

Not even bothering to close the drawer, she immediately turned around and looked for the safest place to hide— hopefully the giant curtain would do. At least long enough for her to find a more permanent solution.

The curtain ruffled and waved after her path.

After making sure that she could keep an eye on the only exit in the room, she turned the flashlight off.

The door opened.

To her surprise, the place right outside the door was just as dark as the room she was in. That helped her make herself less noticeable by hiding in the dark, but sadly, it meant that she would be completely blind as well. Still, she locked her eyes in the direction of the door, trying to keep a mental image of the surroundings and the different objects in the room, for lack of being able to keep sight of them.

Well, well, now *this* is getting interesting and new…

Maybe it was worth the wait, after all. Just maybe.

She heard footsteps entering the room. They were slow and quiet at first, almost as if whoever they belonged to was trying to avoid making too much noise.

She heard them stop for a few seconds. Then she finally heard one of her captors’ voice.

“… oh boy. uh… hey, kid?” they called out to nowhere in particular. “i take it you woke up? sorry, i prolly should’ve prepared a note or something.”
That appeared to be a man, but there was a strange timbre in his voice that puzzled her deeply. It sounded almost like his voice was being muffled by something, but she couldn’t quite put her finger on it and it didn’t really strike her as the most accurate explanation.

Given the manner the sound of his voice came to her in irregular volumes, she realized that he had to be turning his head in multiple directions and looking for her.

Which meant that he hadn’t found her yet.

“look, i probably spooked ya pretty badly earlier, but… i know you’re still here, and i won’t take long to find you, so, you can come out right now and save us both the trouble.”

Ha. He was already admitting defeat. That would be easy.

“i’m sure you have a lot of questions, right now. which is pretty convenient, ‘cause i have a lot of answers to give ya. we can just sit down and have a nice chat. no pressure. i mean, i know you must think that this situation’s way too weird and all, but you’re not in danger, a’right?”

Damn right I’m not in danger, she thought bitterly, rolling her eyes in contempt. She almost huffed in disbelief, but she managed to stop herself from doing that when she immediately realized that such irrelevant act would have given away her position in no time. Still, though, was that guy stupid? Why the heck would you have kidnapped me, dumbass? To give me a hug?

She tried to ignore the gullibility and foolishness in his words, instead focusing on how to take advantage of them. She could clearly hear his footsteps and locate him. He couldn’t locate her, but that was because she wasn’t moving or making any sounds. Yet.

She clearly remembered where the door was, and she clearly remembered that she had not heard him close it. Which meant that if she could find just the right window in time and space…

All she had to do was assess a few distances and trajectories.

She would be patient. She would wait.

And then she would seize the moment.

The footsteps were now not too far from her, probably around five to ten feet away; but they were pretty far from the door. If she remembered right the disposition of the room, he had to be around the desk. Soon…
But then he stopped walking, and silence engulfed the room and left her in total blindness.

She waited, wondering what he was doing since he wasn’t anywhere near her to begin wi—

Something grabbed her arm.

“welp. found you.”

She screamed.

She yanked her arm away from him in a sudden yet strong movement that seemed to have left him stunned for a split second. Part of her was surprised by how easy it had been for her to elude his grasp, and by how physically weak he had appeared to be in comparison with her — she almost thought she heard him wince in surprise and pain while taking a few steps back, when she had raised and sent her arm flying around without warning.

However, that part of her went completely unnoticed by the others when adrenaline enhanced her reflexes and blinded her thoughts.

Hardly a second after her arm was freed, she took action again. Turning towards him swiftly, she pressed a button and brandished the flashlight at him like a deadly weapon. She immediately heard an additional grunt from the stranger, as he was momentarily blinded by the torch’s unexpected Powerful Beam. It’s super effective!

… Or not. But it’s enough for the stupid girl to smirk in victory. What’s she thinking, that she’s the hero beating up the bad guys or that she’ll make a brilliant escape with that stupid stick? Besides, this is basically stealing. But who am I to judge, eh?

Ha, take that! she mentally grinned. Next time, don’t leave dangerous weapons lying around, you jerk.

Although he took a few more steps back and now stood right by his desk, and although he kept rubbing his eyes with his left hand for a few more seconds, the victim of her harmless attack had a rather quick adaptation to the new brightness of his surroundings. And as soon as he lowered his pale arm, the girl couldn’t help but slightly lower hers as well, now facing the stranger with a blank expression.

“… heh. already throwin’ in the spotlights, kid?” he chuckled lightly. “i didn’t realize you’d want to get enlightened on the truth so soon. ‘specially since, uh. you didn’t seem so interested by my brilliant idea a minute ago.”
Upon realizing who it was… Actually, what really surprised her was her complete lack of reaction, in fact.

You know, it’s that very specific state of mind that makes you realize that everybody has their own quota of strange things that can happen to them, and that the limit of the weirdness they can handle at a time is very personal and specific to each individual. Once you’ve got past the line, you just reach that point where practically nothing can surprise you anymore, if only temporarily.

So when your limit is indeed crossed by the cruelty of nature, you just stand there, mouth slightly agape, staring at what put you in this state and mentally nodding in that ‘This is normal’ gesture, because it would require too much from your neurons to process an explanation or just muster the energy to say that this is not supposed to happen.

So yeah, if you were following this train of thought, this is the state our little pseudo-protagonist was in.

“a’right, maybe the last one was a bit of a stretch.” He rolled his eyes and shrugged overdramatically. Then he paused and his grin expanded. “but don’t tell me it completely left ya in the dark, eh…?”

… Aaand he threw the finger gun. Damn it.

He finally seemed to notice that the teenage girl wasn’t reacting at all. No laughs, no smiles, not even grunting. Only… well, that same face of utter shock as from the beginning. Except that by that time she had gradually stepped back until she bumped into the wall behind her and couldn’t go any further, and that now she appeared to be holding on to it for dear life.

When he saw her drop the flashlight, he realized that by that time, the girl might have just completely disconnected from reality for a minute or two.

Well, by now I guess it should be someone else’s cue to say something along the lines of: “Sans, I think you broke the human.”

“uh… hello? did your power… black out, too…?”

He seemed a little desperate for an answer, by that point. Whether positive or negative.

Nevertheless, he still obtained none.
Yeah, even you can see that this one was the lamest of all, buddy.

“… ugh. too soon for puns, got it.” He buried his hands further into his pockets and seemed to sink his head into his shoulders, as he looked away in disappointment and mumbled under his breath: “tough crowd.”

She quickly stared at what appeared to be a *living skeleton*, rising and lowering repeatedly her gaze down to all the details she could perceive. Despite his still being pretty much hidden in the distant shadows, far away from the silly little Trustworthy Flashlight’s brightness now that it was not focused on his face anymore, she immediately noticed the trademark blue hoodie that she could have recognized anywhere. And his short pants. And the bones. She did not want to focus on the bones. But still, she immediately realized that she *perfectly* knew who this was.

Well, rather, who this guy [*looked like*].

She couldn’t help but smile awkwardly. She hated it when she couldn’t understand what was going on. Nervous smirks didn’t really help, but she couldn’t stop them from appearing on her face whenever she was tense and anxious.

And especially when she was mocking herself for actually starting to seriously consider some dumb and random option that was just *not* possible.

This, simply, was not Sans. There basically was no way. Some random pile of pixels from a simple *video game* could not magically all of a sudden become corporeal and sentient and *be facing her right now in the four dimensions of space and time*. She would *not* discuss that science fact, that was simply out of the question.

Whoever she was facing right now was just *Not. Him*.

*Undertale was not. Real.*

She had no idea why that random creepy guy would want her to think otherwise, though.

Well, she *had* a few hypotheses, but none of them really could conveniently justify all the trouble the man must have come into just to order everything in place to the slightest details. That was necessary if he wanted to be convincing of course, but… Just, *what was that for*?

Well, on second thought, no matter what reasons she could think of, that whole mess would have just been unnecessarily overcomplicated and frustrating to prepare, in comparison with the results they would have got anyway. For an instant she almost considered pretending she actually fell into his trap, and improvising some kind of ‘roleplay’ or something out of pity, but she quickly felt very
uneasy about it. She had been *kidnapped* after all. There was no room for jokes with your kidnapper.

And yet, although she had quickly bent down to retrieve the flashlight she had let fall on the floor at some point, she would not raise her arm back and try to cover his face with its light once again. Nah, his face was very good the way it was right now in the shadows, thank you very much.

Her hand was a little shaky and cold, raising the light stick would only make things worse.

“… Ha. That was a really good impression of Sans.” she eventually uttered in a voice that sounded much less confident than she had intended to. “Also his lab. Honestly, I’d *almost* buy it if it weren’t for a few details. Like, you know. The fact that he’s not real. Just saying.”

There was no worded response from Definitely-Not-Sans. She thought she might have heard a distant outburst of laughter, but it stopped abruptly and she hadn’t seen him move. He was still standing in the shadows, staring at her with an unreadable total lack of expression, both his hands deeply buried into his pockets.

Well, when his whole face was engulfed in the dark, it was quite difficult to distinguish it clearly anyway… But she thought she could see that little glimmer of a confused and slightly embarrassed “… excuse me, what?” in his shining pupils— even though she completely ignored it (these can’t be pupils, it’s just a costume! He probably just used LEDs or something like that).

“The computer is new, uh? I-I’ve never seen its sprite, u-unless it’s supposed to be Papyrus’s. And I was sure there only was *one* big machine at most— the one in the back, I mean, all the others over there are just decoys, right? O-oh, and the thing I was sleeping on, too. It’s the green couch, isn’t it? W-well, too bad, it wasn’t supposed to be in this room.” She tried to cross her arms and puff out her chest as an attempt to increase her confidence. The effectiveness of such act was debatable. “So. See? If y-you wanted me to think that I’d somehow got drawn into the game or whatever, you got another thing coming.”

For at least a good dozen seconds, the guy simply stared at her in disbelief, not knowing how to react. Was there just any way to properly react? He wondered.

He refused to regard this as a possibility at first, but…

… *oh. oh god she’s serious.*

He had to muster all his remaining energy in the sole objective of not openly bursting out laughing.
at her face. He would not be able to regain a straight face afterwards and he needed to get serious at some point. But– she just…

Yeah, pretty much feeling you there, buddy. I think we reached the jackpot.

However, the only thing that girl was able to see from her current spot was that Definitely-Not-Sans had finally decided to get on the move, muffling what sounded like some kind of (almost) amused chuckle while… slightly shrugging, maybe. It was really hard to see what he was doing in the dark, but she preferred that rather than raising that torchlight back at him.

He wondered whether he should directly tell her or just roll with it and let her realize on her own. But seeing how potentially unstable (and arguably hilarious) she could get, the second option seemed to present itself as the most appropriate. She had already fainted once before due to him being too straightforward, after all— to such extent, she seemed to not even remember that it had ever happened. Granted, she had just seen him for less than ten seconds and then fainted immediately, so there probably wasn’t much to remember anyway.

Either way, he wasn’t willing to reiterate the experience. Besides, maybe doing things her way would give him the opportunity to extract some information from her if he was lucky enough. He was pretty curious about a lot of things himself.

He would let her deduce the truth at her own pace.

At least, he would try.

Still, he feared that this would take a while.

“heh… ok wow. i see you DO know that game in the details. i’ll admit, i’m impressed.” He chuckled a little more, then gave a nod towards the faraway sofa on his right side. “you’re pretty observant. yes, that’s the couch from the living room. put it down here a few weeks ago.”

When she lent another glance at the sofa, she could indeed realize that it did look a lot like the one from the game.

But of course the stupid girl had to guide the flashlight towards the oh-so-fascinating piece of furniture she had already inspected mere minutes ago anyway and leave the skeleton without surveillance, if only for just one freaking second. I kinda hoped at some point… But no, we’ll have to cope with the Ultimate Idiot kind. Oh well, not everything can be perfect, huh?

Still. How much do you wanna bet this is gonna backfire on her within the next seconds?
And indeed, as soon as her eyes strayed away from him, the sound of a few calm footsteps suddenly caught her attention from behind, and when she turned back her gaze and Trusty Torch towards the spot where he had been standing until then, she noticed he wasn’t there anymore, nor anywhere nearby. Instead, she found him a few seconds later lying lazily on the couch, his arms idly stretching over its soft greenish back as he used his hands as makeshift pillows and grinned trollesquely (wait no it’s just a mask).

… Well, role-playing all along, wasn’t he?

He sure was enjoying this.

... Still, how the heck did he get there so quickly?

The Trusty Torch started to shake and the shadows of the room followed, dancing around its cold immaculate white.

“By the way, uh, wow. You really must’ve put a lot of effort into making all this. And I don’t know that much about time travel mind-screws, but, those blueprints are quite convincing. You really must be a hardcore fan, aren’t you?” She chuckled shakily, unconvinced. “Can I just ask you, uh, why you did all this exactly? You do realize this is technically a kidnapping, right?”

She was trying to take it lightly and make it sound as if it were a joke, but it felt obvious that it definitely wasn’t. This masquerade had been lasting for long enough; besides, all this really was starting to get on her nerves.

She simply could not understand. This entire situation was making no sense whatsoever, this place was starting to freak her out although she was still sort of glad that this guy disguised as a skeleton was keeping some distance between them because that really was the last thing she could be getting to complete the scheme even though those were definitely not real bones—

Oh gosh, she was starting to hyperventilate again. It kept getting harder to hold the stupid stick, as if it were now made of lead. Viscous and wet lead.

… Wait, no, the humidity was just the cold sweat. Nothing strange here. Hahaha.

“… hey. you alright kiddo?”

It felt odd that he genuinely seemed slightly concerned, even if he was good at hiding it on his face (duh, he was obviously wearing a mask, so of course his entire face was hidden). But no, his tone could not fool anyone, he had picked on the nervousness surrounding her.

He did not particularly care about that stranger (heck, he didn’t even know that kid to begin with);
but still, seeing *anyone* in that state was concerning enough as it was.

He was squishing the sofa’s cushions in his bony fingers, as if he were on the verge of rushing towards her if she were to collapse because of her shaky pale legs.

Interestingly, it appeared that this last observation was what pushed her to take a step back and answer in a fast and winded voice as soon as she caught her breath back. She stiffened in an attempt to regain control of her tremors.

“As alright as could any *normal* person be when they find themselves trapped in a dark locked room after being kidnapped by a lunatic dressed like *Undertale’s* most memetic and creepy-yet-popular character for whichever psychopathic reasons you found, *thanks.*” she retorted bitterly with a desperate sarcastic grin.

… Well, if she still had enough energy for sarcasm, then her case probably wasn’t *that* worrying after all. Still just a bit.

“ha, yeah, right… sorry for leavin’ you all alone in the dark. i thought i could leave for a bit and try to do something about the blackout while you were out, but i guess my little experiment *might* have done a bit more damage than i thought… heh eh.”

For a short instant, he seemed to actually hesitate, as if he were measuring his words and trying carefully to choose the exact ones. Though it seemed that beyond the mere words, their repercussions were what truly bothered him.

She clearly was not doing nearly as fine as he would have preferred, but she just… *had* to hear the truth at some point, right? Normally, he would not have bothered with something like this—especially because, at least at the beginning, this had some nice potential as joke material, and he wondered whether she would keep finding excuses to ‘prove’ that he weren’t real even while she would see more about this world. However… he remembered how she had first reacted, and that had *not* been pretty.

He feared that if he stopped caring about this issue and just rolled with things as they were, the moment everything would click in her mind would just so happen to be the worst possible moment. Namely, the moment she would find some irrefutable evidence that would let her realize *everything* all at once— just like the moment when he had shoved her through his machine’s portal with blue magic when they met for the first time.

She had freaked out to the point where she fainted instantly and had no later recollection whatsoever about this event, after all. She could totally do it again. So… Baby steps.
“i’ve been using that basement a lot, y’know, since i’ve been working on some pretty… otherworldly stuff, recently. and it all allowed you to get here, in the end. you’d find it pretty fantastic if you only tried to believe it and stopped waving that torch at random. so uh, guess you could say it’s time to see the light, now. ain’t i right…?”

… Seriously, is that all you’ve got? Even I can tell that this pun was objectively lame.

She merely glared at him and pouted in frustration as her grip on the torchlight tightened. That guy’s attitude was starting to annoy her to such extent, she was almost starting to forget her instinctive feeling of dread.

She was completely incapable of watching horror films without being found whimpering in a corner as soon as the first bits of gore appeared and as a consequence she hardly ever watched any, but anybody could easily deduce that dark locked basements and masked suspicious men were never a good match; the fact that she was starting to give her annoyance more credit than that primal fear was a pretty talkative fact on its own.

Part of her almost wanted him to shift to the ‘kidnapper’ part and start to explain what was going on. That, at least, would have been less frustrating than watching him pseudo-roleplaying by sitting on the couch and saying meaningless ‘pranks’ that weren’t even supposed to be funny to the slightest.

“Speaking of getting me here, I am wondering: why me? I mean, if it has anything to do with Undertale, then it’s not like I could be the ‘best fan you could have ever found’ or some other stupid thing like that. I never even played the game in the first place.”

For some reason, she almost felt that guy’s overwhelming silence the very instant she had uttered that last sentence. She was not completely sure why, but it was almost as if she had just sensed his sudden tension without even needing to turn her eyes and watch it on his face, in spite of the distance between them.

And even though she simply dismissed this feeling as a mere coincidence or some kind of ‘predictability’ she could have intuited in his excessively silent reaction, she was still slightly taken aback by how seriously he seemed to take that revelation, feeling this rising… was this confusion or anger? Or both?

The skeleton’s grip on the sofa tightened once more; but this time, it was for a completely different reason.
“Wait. Seriously?” he uttered as calmly as he could, though probably a little too fast and somberly.

It was the first time she really paid attention, but since the beginning she had noticed that there was something peculiar about the timbre in his voice. Until now she had assumed that it was only due to the fact that his mask (it had to be some sort of latex mask after all, this was the only possibility, right?) had to be somewhat muffling his words, but this time… She couldn’t help but notice that this time it really had sounded even stranger than before.

If it really had been Sans in one of his in-game dialogues, she could have almost guessed that he would have put some capitals in his speech, for once. And one thing she had learned fast enough through the fandom was that with that monster, proper capitalization was never a good sign.

*Good thing that option is definitely out of the way.*

“Yeah!” she shrugged obliviously. “Honestly, I suck so much at video games, you have no idea. I’ve even been wondering if there was something like a world record for that. I’m not kidding, even if I wanted to play that game, I wouldn’t even survive five minutes.”

And there came back that exact same awkward silence. He was uncomfortably staring at her without even moving the slightest from his seat, narrowing and twitching his eyes, which from that distance could only be distinguished through what was supposed to mimic a pair of eye-sockets.

With that giant smile stuck on his mask, it was tricky to decipher what the expression on his real face could be; but he really seemed to be deeply confused, if not… shocked.

The small lights in his eye-sockets darkened as he stared at her with always more intensity. That brat obviously knew very specific facts about what seemed to be background details that most of the common players would have most definitely overlooked without question, and yet not only she first claimed that she had nothing to do with it all, but now she even had the nerve to…

So this was how things were.

This all made so much more sense now. *Of course* nobody could be dumb enough to stay so oblivious for that long.

Just what kind of human could be so smart and observant that they would remember and point out details so minor that he would have not noticed them himself nearly as fast, and yet be so dense that she wouldn’t even acknowledge the most obvious detail that was lying right under her nose?
It was all so clear now. She already knew. She already knew, and she had been playing dumb all along.

This was such evil brilliance. He had to hand it to that brat, she had managed to fool him for much longer than most had before her. Thankfully, she had made a fatal mistake that immediately exposed her lies.

Well, if this was the way things had started, then he could just as well play pretend along with her, huh. He would need to be more careful with his words and pay close attention to hers, but he could always try to squeeze some juicy answers out of her in the process.

“Well, maybe. But… you must have at least tried at some point, right?” he asked warily. “You were about to start a very special run, at that. Weren’t you?”

She would eventually spill the beans. She had to. She did not necessarily have to be a completely rotten apple.

Or if she was, she seemed to be talkative enough that her words would betray her at some point. All he had to do was make her talk until the truth came out by itself.

Her innocent tone and stupid attitude had been amusing him at first, but now that he knew that it was just a façade, this was only making him sick. What could be lying underneath? Part of him dreaded to find out.

“Well, yeah, I was about to play it since my friends kept trying to make me for the past few weeks. But somehow I ended up here before I could actually get started, so nope, I technically never played the game.” She turned her eyes towards him and squinted them into a dark glare before continuing. “I wonder who’s at fault for dragging me away from my laptop.”

Both his eye-sockets twitched once, very furtively, both at the same time; but besides that, he had remained perfectly still for what felt like whole minutes now. And even then, his last gesture had been subtle and she reasoned that latex masks could probably not make that sort of motion, so she decided that it had to be her imagination.

“Hey, are you alright?” She mockingly repeated the words he had previously used to address her when she had been in a similar state. “You almost look like you’re about to collapse or something.” She was not even hiding her nervous yet genuinely sarcastic chuckle. “Seriously, I’m the one who was kidnapped here. Are you gonna explain what’s going on or not?”
He paused, tensely running a white hand along his face and slowly burying his eyes into his fingers, as to try to rub off some kind of nausea. The rubbing let out a little rattling sound that gracefully put the teenager even more at unease, as she unconsciously stepped back and bumped into the wall once again. Did latex make that sort of sound when you rubbed it…?

… And wait a minute. Did she just see his mask blink?

No. No-no-no. Not possible. That didn’t happen. Nope. Her fear and tension were just playing tricks on her again.

“n… never mind. let’s just… change the subject. how do you happen to know that much about that, uh, game, then? you sure seem to know an awful lot, for someone who allegedly never touched it.”

Her eyes suddenly widened in what would seem to be genuine surprise, but some discreet eerie sparks of anger twinkled in the corners of her flickering eyelids.

“Oh yeah, sure, that’s more like the kidnapper part to ask the questions and ignore mine.” she snapped exasperatedly, rolling her eyes in growing annoyance. “Are you kidding? You kidnap me and then all you do is start some random cosplay and lie in that couch and such, and now you’re just expecting me to tell about my hobbies just like we’re talking about the weather around a cup of tea!”

She crossed her arms and huffed tensely. Her patience really started to reach its limit now, and that was saying something. But seriously, that was just starting to make way too much weirdness for her standards.

“Well, sorry to disappoint, but I’m not here for casual banter. I want an explanation, and I’m gonna get one.”

He sighed in anticipation, but locked his white lights on her and spied on each of her movements and expressions. She didn’t even give him a glare, because she already knew that whatever he could say, she wouldn’t be contented with it anyway. She didn’t even care whether or not he was still there watching her; if he wasn’t getting to the important part, then she would be. There was so much waiting could do. Once the right opportunity was found, it was time to get moving.

Starting with the first logical conclusion she could think about, she looked around and brandished her torchlight in various directions, sometimes gesturing some discreet lines as she was trying to figure out some sort of trajectory. Then she started to approach the desk again, lifting random blueprints and sheets before replacing them approximately in the same mess as before. When she seemed to fail to find whatever she had in mind, her gestures nevertheless resumed the cycle at a
faster rate and she paced towards more locations in the room to investigate more thoroughly.

Well isn’t that the face of one big desperate girl there. The way she keeps digging her own grave is truly baffling. In a sort of mesmerizing way, almost. Could such mixture between powerful observation skills and incredible foolishness really exist?

“What are you looking for?” he eventually asked tiredly, but with what seemed to be some little spark of curiosity and amusement. No way this was needed to be reckoned with, this now really was pure stupidity. She wouldn’t find anything dangerous in there.

“The camera,” she answered immediately, not even turning her eyes towards him. “You can’t be a REAL kidnapper, you made way too many mistakes, and this act is just preposterous. So this is some kind of prank, right? There’s a camera somewhere in this room, recording us right now, and when you submit the file we’ll become internet famous or whatever.”

… Excuse me?

“You know, unless you’re using an infrared camera, I don’t think anyone’s gonna see much on the images; but I’ll admit, keeping the lights out were a good way to better hide your equipment and put the right atmosphere, so maybe you’re not completely an amateur. What are you looking for, YouTube money? Well… I’m sure the result must be hilarious, so maybe you did make a safe bet with that. It’s pretty easy to make Undertale videos viral.”

Definitely-Not-Sans seemed to widen his eyes in genuine surprise, for once. Though he still was obviously amused by all her (indeed) pretty much hilarious gesticulations here and there, he just… The way she managed to make her performance sound so genuine despite the stream of sheer absurdities she was uttering was simply beyond him.

“… ok, wow. so you really are of the conspiracy theory type, huh?”

“Well, usually not that much, but it’s not like there were many other options left.” She had stopped her search for a few seconds, only to turn to him and let shine that big cocky smirk that was supposed to look sarcastic… but it really just looked pathetic.

“Haha. yeah. you’re right. t’s not like there was the obvious and simple option that it could all be real.”

Now staring at the desk and the things lying messily around it, she opened her mouth to confirm in
the most confident and cynical tone she could get— but she never found the time to actually say anything.

Something had caught her shoulder from her back.

The grip felt so strong and *done*.

“just kidding. it’s high time you get real, kid.”

That voice, that *same voice* that was coming *seconds* ago from the couch, was now sounding right from behind her back. She shivered and, as a reflex, looked over her right shoulder— But then she met in the dim light, hardly a foot away from her eyes, something that was *definitely not* a latex mask.

His left eye was still flickering an eerie blue, coming from the depths of his eye socket. The light magically stopped a split second later, but its striking impression remained.

His stuck and still giant smirk sliced his whole face in half and somehow seemed to keep enlarging itself in an eerily edgy forced grin.

**Bones.**

It was real. Oh God this was real. This was Sans and he was staring at her and he looked *so done* and everything she had said about him and the game he had heard it all and he was real. Her eye fell on that white hand still clutching her shoulder, its holes and its so fragile yet so strong phalanges and its iron grip on her flesh and the cold

She let out a sudden hysterical cry, but she could not even hear it herself. She didn’t even feel her vibrating vocal chords, although they were shaking and struggling in an attempt to escape it, threatening to be torn apart any instant.

The entire room started to turn around her at an ever-growing speed, while flickering lights and orange and red and dim yellow in pitch black and skulls and claws crawling on her back and the dark ceiling and low yells all resonated in unison like distorted laughs of…

… She passed out. *Again.*
Sans watched with bewilderment at what had suddenly become an unconscious body that had fallen down on the tiled floor, without any warning and apparently not about to move again for a while.

He started to tremble in exasperation as his left hand ran upon his skull, slowly covering his eye-sockets as they were slowly darkening.

He tried to let out a reasonably controlled sigh so he could stay calm, but he could feel his patience run out entirely.

... seriously?

Read via Screenshots Here (full formatting but may encounter loading issues)
Act 1, Scene 2.1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Learn When to Quit

— Act 1 —

Don’t Let Him Find Out

Scene 2.1

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This is the main index where you can choose which way you wish to read the chapter.

Read via Screenshots Here (full formatting but may encounter loading issues)

Read Plain Text Here (formatting limited to what AO3 can do)
She grumbled weakly, as her arm tried to blindly mop her blanket and pull it back to her side. What a nightmare she just had... Not only had it been ridiculous, it was terrifying as well. And annoying.

She really couldn’t find her blanket. Or her pillow. Or matter— whatever her head was lying on, that was not a pillow. She was getting cold. So annoying.

... *Wait a minute*.

She opened her eyes in a start and stared down. This wasn’t her bed either.

She saw a cold light in the distance. She stared. Definitely-Not-Sans was sitting at the desk and had the flashlight back on top of the desk lamp so he could work on a huge messy pile of papers. Probably best. She saw him wave a pen around and scratch the back of his skull with a rattling sound that made her shiver. Even thought she heard some grunting and mumbling at some point.

Until his movements went to a halt and he became motionless, save for the occasional twitch of his head or arms. Then she knew it was over.
a statue. Very slowly, she saw him turn his chair so he faced her. He looked annoyed.

“oh. hey. you sure like to take your time, uh..."

His head was now resting nonchalantly on his hand, whose elbow was leisurely lying on the desk. She had tried and failed to sound friendly, but boredom and a reasonably controlled irritation wrapped into genuine sarcasm had been audible during some of his possible efforts. The human rose a livid head, her expression still shock and an ever growing fear as her jaw gaped.

*Nope. Nope. Nope. Nope, nope, not happening...*  

Sans rolled his eyes cynically.

“nope, i’m still here. not a dream.” he said, rubbing his forehead as if he were trying to face-palming too openly. “now that this is settled, maybe we could just—”

“Y-You can’t be Sans... Ha-ha-ha, right...? It doesn’t make sense, t-that’s physically i-impossible..."

It sounded as if he grinded his teeth, as he slowly but stood up and started pacing threateningly towards her.

“oh no you won’t, i don’t know how long you w
I don’t know how long you’ve had enough of it to play this game, but I’ve had enough of it.

Her instincts screamed at her to jump out of the room, get the hell away from here, but her legs did not listen. They were rooted to the floor, and the door had probably been locked now, so it wasn’t like she could have gone anywhere anyway.

The skeleton’s left hand closed into a fist as if he had taken a grip onto something. She yelped as she immediately felt some kind of pain coming from her very deep chest, but as soon as his hand into motion, all she really managed to do a tiny gasp in shock—and for breathable air, too. The next instant, all she had time to realize was that she was now stuck floating in midair, her face hardly one foot away from his.

**Wow, now that** escalated quickly! You done good.

His eye flashed with rings of bright cyan ember in the middle of an obscure endless void, and his voice seemed to sound even deeper than before. The empty socket was just pure darkness as its shape seemed to enlarge itself in one round black hole. Part of her wanted to scream, but her gawking mouth was speechless and dry.
“Listen, kid. I've been patient until now, but WAY more important things to do than play babysitter. Especially yours.”

“P-P-PUT ME DOWN!”

He didn’t even flinch in response to that hysterical issuing, instead slightly narrowing his shadowed bony eyebrows. Unlike before when all that could be seen above his face was some vague pale silhouette under the dim shades of the torchlight, this time his entire face was somehow lit from below by a ghastly deep wax, the quivering between them. Although his tone sounded calmer, for once his eyes didn't smile seemed eerily in place as his left iris stabilized upon the abysmal azure shade throwing daggers all around.

“at first i thought you were just being so maybe you are. i mean, you did make a VERY mistake.” The grip in his left glowing fist tightened and the pain in her chest doubled, making her gasp surprise following the feeling of this ever narrowing constriction. “You REALLY must've got some guts take me for an idiot, especially when you don’t know as much as you do.”

“I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT THE HELL YOU TALKING ABOUT!”
He frowned more. His grip tightened more. What it was that she could now feel was huge, that was flashing dark blue, and that was pounding in her chest. It felt as if someone had somehow managed to get by her heart and it was doing its best to keep pounding at a wild rate as if it were about to free itself from her body.

It hurt. He was furious and he was scary and it hurt. He was furious and he was scary and it hurt.

“you already know this, but a long time ago, I promised that if any human came through that door leading to the ruins, then I’d have to put them.” No matter how impossible it was supposed to be, she felt as if his smile had somehow grown larger. His eye suddenly stopped glowing, although he still maintained a strong magical hold on her.

“But you technically didn’t come through that door, did you?”

“PLEASE I’LL DO ANYTHING JUST PUT ME DOWN!”

This time however, he did stop; if only for a split second. His hand faintly lowered, even if his grip was still holding his prey at a reasonable distance from the ground.

The human was forcefully trying to curl up in on himself, trying to meet some kind of ridiculous malformed ball of flesh floating in midair, with a dark blue halo flashing in the middle of a field, she thought.
trembling in the middle of her chest. Her shawl wrapped around her head and covered her ears, eyes were forcibly closed and tearing apart in visible slightly twinkling in the dim light.

For some strange reason, at this instant, Sans still felt that something really was wrong; as if inte knew that any other normal human was not meant that badly.

He had obviously meant to give her a scare; but the type of human this was; given that even the due these players were able to predict any of the characters’ behaviors at least to some extent, at the incredibly exhaustive knowledge she had proven to hold... Shouldn’t she have expected him similarly to this? Shouldn’t she have seen this coming?

She had proven to be quite the sassy and resourceful and a pretty observant one at that, easily to the actually becoming dangerous if she started just conclusions and going back to that ‘paranoia mode’. Sure, he had seen her shaking and stuttering even his first conversation with her, but even when he obvious, he had simply assumed that she was the person who would sneakily bite back in the case of just like what she had done the last time.

This realization had come of shock in one word and sek
This radical change of behavior was deeply disturbing to say the least. He first tried to dismiss this impulse away, he reasoned that she was probably faking such a top response so he would let his guard down and at the worst moment, if only for an instant—feeling would only get stronger the longer he waited. At this pitiful view, and the fact that her soul was visible and fully within his grasp only made her true allure all the more obvious.

This was not the expression of a calculating lady or crocodile tears.

“Put me down” she repeated again and again, shaking and desperately imploring voice, “put-me-down, put-me-down please put-me-down ooh put-me-down so-sorry-but-oh-my-God-put-me-down...”

His eye-sockets closed as he sighed tensely. As minutes remained deeply annoyed by the time they were his anger was simply and effectively defeated by surprise and confusion, and his hand carefully guided the crybaby back in place on the couch, before he regrasp. Act or not, it was now definite that pushing her way would lead nowhere. So much for trying to spill the beans.

For the next few seconds, he stood in front of her, for the right moment to finally start explaining his
for the right moment to finally start explaining him just begin an actual conversation... But the kid was still stop crying and shaking, even though he could tell was trying her best to calm down on her own.

... Well. That was awkward.

“uhh... ok, maybe i pushed it a bit too far, but i still a little mad at you for lying to me about the game thing... but that stuff doesn't even matter in the end, so... i mean, uh, what with you kn even more about the game than I do... i thought it was obvious that i was mostly messin' with you.

Yeah, it really wasn’t.

He watched as the fleshy ball kept trembling and for about one or two more minutes, and he even brought his rolling chair along as soon as his laziness him that he was getting bored. He could hear mutter distorted words sounding like some apologies, but it took a while before she finally put crimson head away from her arms and strain actually meet him in the eyes.

Or at least, she just tried to stare back at the pair glowing pellets glaring at her, given the fact that the source of light available was once more only that little faraway torchlight, sitting on top of the des
at least a dozen feet away from them. From that angle she could still somewhat imagine the skeleton's face under the dim cold light, but it only sharpened his features through dancing ghastly reflections on his skull.

Once more, Sans was slightly taken aback for a half-second upon seeing the expression on her face. If this was some incredibly convincing act, then the genuine emotion it read was crystal clear:

For some reason, it almost appeared as if the mere act of looking at him was actually painful.

He had seen fear. He knew what fear looked like. This definitely was something else.

“... Sans.” was all she eventually managed to whisper in a broken voice that still somewhat struggled to hide her terror, to no avail.

“you’re still on to that?” he lifted his non-plussed eyebrows with a cynical mock-surprise. “I felt you’d have realized when you were hangin’ on to that string in the air. or, uh. back to when we met all those years ago. what, an hour ago by now?”

She clumsily pushed her way back into the deep sofa (and almost lost her balance in the process), apparently trying to increase the distance between them as much as it was physically possible.
much as it was physically possible. Then she looked down and trembled again.

“I-I really didn’t. S-sorry. I m-must’ve looked st”

“pretty much.” he nodded in a mockingly solemn.

The awkward silence resumed. He heard her sniff to recompose herself, but it was obvious that she looked deeply shaken. Sans thought about all the things he wanted to explain, but after a few more seconds, he decided that maybe that could wait a little, at least in and sighed. Maybe they both needed a time-out. There was so much a serious existential-crisis conversation could do, especially under such circumstances.

“... look. i get it, you know...? i took you wherever you used to be and got you here, and you never asked for anythin’, you had no idea this game you used to play was actually all whatever...” He shrugged and took an authentic genuinely calm breath. “must be pretty to have the truth hammered onto you like t’was hard for me, too.”

She slowly raised a pair of red swollen eyes towards him, silently watching him with a mixture between sadness and... was this some actual, genuine concern? He didn’t seem to be paying her any attention to...
he hardly gave her a glance, and sighed instead.

“but in the end, ok. maybe it wasn’t the same kind of shock. since, um,” he sent her an awkward look and looked as if he was sincerely making a joke, not the one who used to take over a child’s and slaughter everyone in sight literally but it’s a game and you’re doing it for fun. heh etc.

The girl’s head was slowly buried in her arms as her cheeks reddened in embarrassment and guilt.

... Ouch. I never even played the game to begin with but OUCH.

She was trying to take deep breaths, slowly taking in the consequences of these events.

Undertale was real. The Resets were real, if the video she knew really was controlling this world. A Route had been attempted at some point and remembered it. Did he remember it because he could remember the Resets, or because it was the event he had just been through? As far as the theories and the actual canon game evidence pointed toward that Sans could not remember the Resets, so...

She shivered. That only left them with the second option. Sans had kidnapped her because she was about
Undertale herself, so it meant that the Player was responsible for multiple bad things occurring in the game. Definitely the Resets. Maybe even more than ‘just’ that.

She lowered her eyes and buried a little more in her arms, deep in thought.

If she was getting things straight, then the most part was that *somehow*, the game was real. It was sentient people, and not just meaningless sprites with predetermined dialogues and actions to perform without any hint of actual individual thought into it. The players were not toying with pixels, but with real people. The reason why their dialogue could be always the same, yet so easily changed by the subtest shifts in the actions, was because they couldn’t remember the previous action, thus were prone to simply repeat their actions every time itself was rewound and they were connected to the same circumstances over and over.

It made no sense, but when facing this specific context, it seemed to be the only thing that *would* make sense. Sans’s dialogue’ here sure was a lot more a part of the simulation she could imagine, sure had felt physically tangible enough when he helped her that last time, *thank you very much*.

... And yet, there still was something that prevented her from sounding truly real to her. She had entirely
For all she knew, the original video game made it their lives were still led by numbers, and the fans it as canon too for the most part— because it was canon that they were literally living in a video. Monsters and humans alike had “LOVE” and “ENEMIES,” basic attacks followed predetermined patterns (in canon that monsters could somehow be offered as presents), their fights were turn-based and their turns were apparently confined within the sole limits of their turn, and their physical abilities depended only on such as “HP,” “ATK” and “DEF.” A real world made sense would not accept such things to alongside its regular laws of physics. Even just the thing itself—she enjoyed sci-fi stories and theories all she knew, time travel was just impossible.

So even if they were truly sentient and deserving of respect and rights as real characters people, necessarily make them physically real. Their world’s mechanics simply wouldn’t make sense otherwise were just as real as her own.

In a way, it was... almost reassuring. This world was own, but it was still a lot more predictable, and She would have to adjust to quite a few things of but logically, she should soon find her way through
but logically, she should soon find her way through. Both this world and its inhabitants felt real, but she had to remember that they could not possibly be but some sort of virtual simulation, could they? The Matrix! Yes. As realistic and sentient they seem, Sans and all the others just had to be some futuristic artificial intelligences. Very, very elaborate, actually sentient artificial intelligences apparently feel actual emotions and having real virtual families and human (?) moralities. Hahahaha.

That wouldn’t prevent her from treating them like people of course, because even if they were according to the physical aspect, they still were an ethical one—and thus, they certainly didn’t deserve through all that mess the video game and it apparently put on them.

... That still was one heck of a messed up situation.

Which led her to wonder... How had he reacted to learning by himself that his world wasn’t real? How managed to bring someone real on the physical inside a (supposedly?) virtual place? Was it just a movie The Matrix, and this body she was control no and that looked like her own was, in fact, more than a part of the simulation itself? That might explain some things, maybe, like how
able to... Had he turned her “SOUL” blue? Whatever was that thing that she could feel beating a steady rate inside her chest (and that didn’t act like her regular heart), it sure had never been there before. It had never made itself known, at least. It had been specific to this ‘virtual body’ she must have gained upon arriving in this virtual world... Now that she was aware of it, she wondered what her in-game stats were. After all, if she now had a SOUL in the Undertale... of the word, then it had to mean that she had her own HP as well, right? Would she have 20 HP too? She tried not to think too hard about it. Thinking made her think about taking damage and facing her fears, and she really didn’t look forward to that part.

Then again... Why had she been brought here? Being in this world meant that Sans had found a plan to resolve his problems, and that he was about to put it into motion. And she probably was expected to have some sort of role to play in it, too.

Then again... Sans? Sans was the one who was so long ago... What made things so different this time? What happened to his legendary laziness? Did it go on vacation or something?

“...still.” he eventually added, sighing tiredly. “just thinkin’. it would’ve been nice if you...
y’know. at least admit what you did. and not pretend you never played the game or what

His tone did not sound particularly grave, but the look in his empty eye-sockets was talkative enough. The human only gave him a pair of confused response, frowning in a puzzled pout. He didn’t really care, as if he were certain that against what language said, she knew exactly what he was talking.

“i mean, i know you didn’t really do it on purpose. i’m not actually blamin’ you for anything, ’cause pretty sure you wouldn’t’ve done it if you knew were hurtin’ real people. but that still happen so... i really just expected at least a ‘sorry somethin’. y’know. for courtesy.”

“Wait... W-when you said I was lying, you thought...” Her face blanched as she started to feel nauseous.

“B-but that wasn’t a lie, I swear! It really was—”

“kid, if you wanted to convince me that you never did anything wrong, you should’ve harder than that.”

She sent him a persistent and bewildered blank look. After a few seconds during which they simply staring contest as if their silence could bend the
in their favor, Sans eventually gave in. Why did always have to be so unanimously determined even there was no point to it whatsoever?

“ok, let me put it down more clearly for he eventually sighed in defeat, rolling his eyes annoyed and slowly standing up as he started walking towards his desk. “y’see, the way i believe you here? ‘f course it was related to the game could find your computer’s coordinates. but not all. i wanted to avoid some kinds of accidents y’see, like inadvertently taking someone who was playing for the first time and had no idea whole mess was about, besides not having anything to us yet. that wouldn’t’ve been fair shrugged heavily. “so i’d made sure that the i’d get would be someone who was about to some very specific type of run. one that new aren’t supposed to play or even know about.

His white pupils pierced her like daggers narrowed his eye-sockets. “if you’re here, it you know exactly WHICH run i’m talking Since it’s the one you were about to go through She realized that she did. As she tried to imagine could have used specific programming-related t
select his target, and as she remembered that she had even been kidnapped before she had even been given a chance to take any action whatsoever in the game. She realized that the best way to actually create a truly unique creature was to choose something that was constant in the game and that could only occur in a very limited number of places. For example: *naming the Fallen Human.*

No matter the name given, anyone could go through the same diversity of choices. All names could lead to Pacifist or Genocide routes, without excluding a third Neutrals that went in-between. Sans couldn’t predict that a player would automatically go through one route or another before they even had time to defeat the first monster in the game.

However... there was a very special name that led to special consequences.

“so let me recap.” he continued. “you showed extensive knowledge about the game’s details, even i had no idea about, you try to play the game on hard mode, and when you arrive here you have the gall to tell me that you NEVER played it because you SUCK at video games? you must have some nerve to keep pretending your actions make any sense whatsoever by now.”

She opened her mouth to object. She left it out.

She opened her mouth to object. She left it open for a second or two, but no sound came out. Her eyes lowered as her lips slowly closed and pursed into an embarrassed pout.

“...O-okay, w-when you put it like that I see what you mean.” She gulped. He was mad, she could tell. Would he attack her? She panicked. “B-but look, I swear I didn’t...!”

“Kid, stop. You’re just embarrassing yourself.” He sounded like he was grinding his teeth. “Trust me, I’m trying REALLY hard to not get mad at you ‘cause I know it’s pointless, but you’re making it easy.”

...Of course he wouldn’t trust her. He had made that clear, after all. He could joke, but he was also a rational and analytical guy when it came to his facts. She reasoned that in his place, she probably would have gone through a similar conclusion herself.

And yet he was wrong. Not because there was a better deduction. But because he simply lacked some evidence that completely changed the story. This made her think back of her best friend’s absolutely brilliant video game, where evidence was everything and the smallest detail could turn the situation around in a flash. Could she do something similar? Was there...
around her that could prove her claims?

She realized that there was. She did have her condo papers with her. Didn’t she? She discreetly slid her hand into her jeans’ back pocket. It was there. A sigh of relief washed over her, although it didn’t leave her any less tense.

She raised a determined look back at him. Although her shivers went back as soon as her eyes caught sight of his face again, she tried to maintain her stance for as long as she could manage.

This was Sans. He was scary, but he was alive, and he was mad, she knew him pretty well. Maybe even more than himself to some extent…? She did not want to think too much about that part.

“I… L-look, I sup-pose you r-really don’t t-trust me but…” She gulped and forcefully closed her eyes, clenching her fists. “If I can prove it. Will you li-sent me?”

He raised a nonexistent eyebrow in what appeared to be confusion and surprise. Under different circumstances, it could have seemed like he looked actually amused this time he probably was just even more annoyed.

After a few more seconds of looking at her up and down, studying her every details as if he were looking for evidence in her demeanor that she was playing him, he dropped his brows.
he appeared to give in once more.

“... heh. why the heck not. maybe you'll get outta me if you're good.” But then he widened his sockets and his white glowing pupils disappeared. “You'd better not be wasting my though.” Of course he’d want to pull that intimidate her and of course she had seen it done before, but of course it was extremely effective nonetheless.

His pupils came back immediately, even though he looked deeply annoyed. He was supposed to look less scary that way, but somehow it didn’t stop him and she had to force her eyes closed and steady in order to try to regain her calm. He crossed his arms in contempt and flumped down in his chair. The sudden motion made its little wheels roll few feet away, but he quickly stopped it by stomping one foot on the ground and he grunted quietly in mumbling curses against the laws of conservation of kinetic energy. His eyes went from staring at the irritation to focusing on her face, sending her a de

“humor me.”

His impatient and menacing tone showed that she definitely not be given a second chance. In understood that she should feel extremely lucky for having given a single chance at all. And he...
even been given a single chance at all. And her time was already running out.
While she would have preferred having been given at least a few more seconds of reflection under different circumstances so she could fully prepare her actions and better calculate the results, it felt obvious that pure luck would have been suicidal (she did not want to even consider whether she should have meant it in a metaphorical or literal way).

So she immediately reached for her phone and dialed it out, quickly turning it on and opening one of its applications.

After a few calculated movements of her thumb across the screen, she shakily rose up from the sofa and extended her arm as far as it could stretch, handing her little skeleton the little skeleton to see. For the first few seconds, he did not move and looked at her in an apathetic manner that quickly seemed to ponder his options and eventually decided to take it. Maybe because he would take the chance to mess with it or find some information on humans or her world, she realized.

... He still looked unimpressed, though.

“what am i looking at?”

“It’s. I-it’s my phone.”

Sans stared with some suddenly renewed interest at the little object he was keeping between his left hand...
little object he was keeping between his left boot turning it around and looking at it through various
that looks... pretty different from the ph know. huh.” He played a bit more with it, weighing in his palm and looking at its white back. “hm.
“Y-yeah, it’s a p-pretty common model where from...” she rambled uneasily, laughing awkwardly and rubbing her arms. “I-I guess that when I-I mean, uh. It just, must’ve come with me. I suSince I... always keep it around me at all times...”
He nodded and hummed again, absorbed in his as if he were contemplating what possibilities this of technology could bring him. Still, he quickly lowered hand on his lap and went back to glare at her with
“anyway. what’s it supposed to prove exactly?
“I-it’s on the app.” she explained. “It’s a convex I had with my friends. R-right before you... b-b arrived here.”
His eye-sockets twitched, but he quickly gave one glance at the phone’s screen and saw words and colors and images. Yep, it looked pretty much a sort of chatroom.
She was still standing between the couch and his now she started regretting that she was not back
on it. Part of her wanted to sink into it and become the furniture so she could stop feeling so anxious. Usually she was one of the most patient people he and relatives knew; but one thing that could bring patience was dread. When she could feel that she could very well depend on how he was about to her arguments, she rationalized that she had no choice but to at least *try* to actively plead for her.

“L-look... Full story is, it was a bet. Okay? It was a joke between my friends, and it’s been going *months*. At first I never even *wanted* to play! I wasn’t completely *against* the idea b-but thought it wasn’t w-worth trying, so... It’s just that today my best friend found a way to make me, Sans kept flipping through the messages, hardly to her. He was completely still. If it weren’t for thumb brushing the screen from time to time might have been mistaken for a statue.

*BlueDoppler*: This is FINALLY happening, get I’m not even kidding.

*Calliope Quill*: Now I’m the lost one. What have we been apparently ”hyping” for exactly?

*BlueDoppler*: Dawn. She’s finally doing it. He carried on brushing through the screen. He wasn’t that tired; he could barely feel his eyes start to feel
how that technology could work, that was truly fascinating. Monsterkind had only ever known phones with physical buttons, so the concept of the *screen* being a universal, ever-changing button all by itself was a complete mystery to him. He would have been interested in playing with it, opening that thing and observing how things worked inside of it.

Alphys would probably have been even more interested than he already was. She would probably be observing it for a few days. Find magical adaptations to the technology in order to improve the daily life of our Underground or something.

“It r-really wasn’t that bad at first. It was just a game between us because, we’ve been friends for months now and we talked about Undertale almost all the time. They were all like, ‘You can’t be a real Undertale fan if you don’t play’, and I kept refusing to play the sake of the joke, so, at some point... It has become some silly game between us, and the only one who’d manage to make me play would be someone or whatever. But Lys...”

@Windows Sulim: Oh Glob, I’m so proud of you right now. How did you do it?

@BlueDoppler: Sometimes blackmail is for the greater good =)
The human had started to pace awkwardly in the room, and as he raised his skull back towards her, still with a twinge of pain, although this time it was for a different reason. He *did* just read the word “blackmail”, in a casual conversation at that. She had said that there were friends hiding behind these logs, and that did make it sound like it was just meant to be a joke — and the human he had right in front of him could have taken it as a joke as well, at first. But “blackmail” wasn’t something to take so lightly, could have such unexpected yet serious consequences.

“S-she cheated. So I didn’t want to play by the rules either. I was about to get my butt kicked at the next mode as soon as I’d start playing, so I just thought, we give them *exactly* what they want, right? I want to keep the Hard Mode as a surprise and see how long it’d take them to notice. I-I mean they didn’t expect me to actually *play* the game because we already knew what the story was all about, we all just wanted to have a good laugh together, so I-thought I’d give them a good show, okay...”

@Pineapplup: ... *sigh* I guess I don’t have a choice uh.

@Joshua: no u don’t 🤔
She had ended up as his target because of Undertale. Not even because she had wanted to give it a try herself at some point, but... She did tell him the truth.

Sans lowered the phone and raised his skull to look at her. She looked like she was trying to keep her composure, but her pacing act had surely been an attempt from her anxiousness by releasing its energy in one of another, but her entire body was shaking and her face was getting watery again. She looked like she wasn’t listening to him. Or caring to listen. Why?

“...you gotta be kiddin.” he eventually whispered, face-palming and muffling some embarrassed laughter.

She jumped at the sound of his voice, and her stare almost seemed to give in for a second. Wow, he really had given her a much more serious reaction than he had anticipated, hadn’t he...?

She turned towards him quickly, pivoting on her feet swiftly without another swift movement, although it was more because of dread rather than an actual voluntary effort. She looked like she could hardly believe what she had heard, and was now staring at him just to make sure that it was indeed real, that it had really happened.
she hadn’t dreamed. He gave her a sheepish grin.

"ok. wow. i uh... wasn’t expectin that. never thought that sort of thing could... what even are the o

"I-I know, right...?" she laughed in bewilderment. This was surreal. Maybe she had fainted again, or this was all just a dream.

"well. uh." He stared down at her phone and realized that he was still holding on to it. He also realized that he might have scrolled a little too far through chat, because the application had seemed to have an error message. Something about not having any Wi-Fi connection available. Sighing, he quickly raised his arm towards her. "here. you want that back."

She merely stared at his hand in disbelief. When she noticed he wasn’t moving, she realized that he expected her to take it. So she swiftly raised a small and seized it by a corner between two fingers, retracted her arm twice as fast.

"Yeah... Big misunderstanding, huh...?" she laid awkwardly, looking away.

"... yeah. sorry." He sighed again, looking away.

"i thought the only type of person who’d hav...
interest in lying to me about ever playin the part she was the ones who did... real bad things when they were in control. so i just... assumed that you were one of them.”

... So that’s what that was all about.

He thought she had gone through the Genocide Run that she had tried to lie to him in order to evade the accusation of having murdered everyone. Maybe he had thought that she was responsible for the timeline they were in right at the moment, or the hypothesis that they were currently stuck in the aftereffects of a (failed) Genocide Run was true. Maybe he even had thought that her denying that she possibly be real had just been another act from after the event, and that she had known all along and just told him whatever it was he had thought her motives were. It was something so stupid could have been. No wonder he had been so mad!

“So. uh... i guess i should be the one to apologize now? ‘specially for earlier...”

“D-don’t worry about it.” she muttered by the way.

“I understand. I’m. Just glad that’s settled.”

“heh... if you say so.” He paused for a small moment, looking to the side; but after a split second, he
looking to the side, but after a split second, he gave her a dorky grin. “uh... h-how about we start... and pretend this never happened?”

She saw a bony hand raise towards her in a jolt. She shivered. She stared at it for a few seconds, before pulling herself out of her trance and staring at him instead.

He saw her timidly raise her left arm to shake his, but her hand was quaking and he was certain her face was supposed to look *that* white. Instead of shaking his hand return though, she suddenly retracted hers and turned around her legs, burying her head between her knees.

“I’d like that.” She smiled shyly and gave him a of and sheepish glance, but her tone was genuine.

Sans watched her behavior with a puzzled look, but simply shrugged and brought his arm back onto his. He gave a light chuckle. Was she shy or scared that he’d fall for a whoopee cushion prank?

“I’m, uh. Dawn, by the way.”

“Yeah, they mentioned your name on that tryout he nodded vaguely. “*I would* introduce myself, but... you know how it is.”

They both laughed. Then stopped. That was awkward. The human lowered her gaze, resting her chin on
Sans saw her eyes glaze over and wrapping her arms around them. Sans saw him some quick glances, but she would never say a word. At some point he tried to encourage her to say what had in mind, and although she seemed reluctant at first, eventually gulped and sent him a sad and empathetic look.

“"I was wondering... For how long have you known about the game? well...” He sighed deeply, looking at the void. “it’s hard to keep track of time on this side, y’know, so i don’t think i could give you a real answer. still, i really found out that you existed pretty recently, i’ll admit...” he shrugged.

She looked down.

“"but, uh, when you see that time keeps jumping back and forth and that the only thing that changes between loops is that the kid does weird new stuff every time, it’s not too hard to figure that something’s not right with’em... something... took over at some point.”

A chuckle burst from him, but it was quickly silenced.

“y’know, it would’ve been much faster if the theory wasn’t erasing most of my research every time one of you wanted to play. it gets old to try to pick up and redo everything from scratch. making
want to just give up after a certain point.”

Yeah... That part wasn’t really new, but there was a huge difference between thinking of it as a character’s depressing demise nobody could do anything about, and... actually facing said fictional character in this very same situation.

“... Wait a minute.” She gave him a shocked, desperately horrified look. “Are y-you implying you can remember the Resets?”

“the what?” He raised a non-existent eyebrow in intense confusion. The befuddled face she probably made him realize that she actually expected him to know, so he thought a little more about it. “oh... wait. did you mean ‘time jump’? t-that’s what we’ve been callin’ them down here, heh heh.”

She blinked in deep puzzlement. That was... new. Then again, she didn’t specifically remember ‘Reset’ having been used in the game at any other than the main menu or Flowey’s dialogue, so maybe she was just influenced by headcanons and alternate timelines. She hadn’t watched an actual playthrough in a while and her memory was fuzzy when it came to telling apart ‘canon’ and ‘fanon’ regarding such minor details in terms of lore.
Wells... and... yeah. That's how we refer to it. I mean, game, and, in general too. It's a ‘Reset’ which restarts the game from the beginning, and a ‘Reload’ if you go back to the last SAVE file, but actually erase all of your progress in the game.

“...that does make it sound like it's a video thing alright. Yikes.”

Maybe that explained why they wouldn't have thought using such term, or even been reluctant to, if they considered the option. Since, under their perspective, wasn't a video game. Ugh...

“Anyway, to answer your question... yeah, it's always been the case, but at some point I noticed to manually save my memories, so now I keep doing every time there's a, uh, ‘reset’, as you say.”

“The game...” She stopped there and bit her lip, looking down. But when Sans gave her a silent cue to ask her to continue, she took a short breath and said, “The game made it look like you couldn’t remember. I just... I had no idea. We had no idea that this...

He had been trapped all this time. She used to think that all these scenarios where he would keep everything and never be happy because of old residues and traumasisms were just the material of fanfics.
drama-inducing stories the fandom had made up.

The worst part was. Since nobody had ever noticed him going off script at any point. Was he just... literal in his part over and over? Why? Was he afraid of what would happen to him if the ‘Anomaly’ realized that he was in the loop? She did remember having read a few stories where Sans was given even more attention and purpose, just because he could remember everything. Couldn’t do anything... Was that it?

This only made her feel even sadder for him, because she was certain that if he had gone off-script and that had been noticed... This would have had much bigger consequences than he could imagine, that much was true; but she was convinced that instead of leading to consequences... it would only have made the players realize. Maybe his situation could have been solved easily if he had just... let them know.

But then again... How could he have given them his attention at all, after what they had done?

“heh... don’t worry about it. i mean, ok that sounds more than you could imagine. but... it’ll be over now. that’s why i brought you here.”

Right. He had a plan. And the plan involved using a... to some extent... What for, though? He had y
anything about it, he hadn’t even gotten started in any rush... Could his plan be already foiled? Did she discovered that she had never played? No, no, he was confident he could still end the problem. then again... what was his plan? Did it have something to do with her being now a part of the game and getting her own in-game ‘SOUL’ and game stats...? Wait, wait. Did he want to do something with her soul?

Maybe she had appeared to become a little too nervous and even fearful, because the skeleton continued, this time with a much more anxious tone:

“Whoa hey, don’t start gettin’ the wrong idea. I had immediately raised his hands in defense, tried to wave them in a pacifying way. He took a short break, then lowered them and laid them on his lap, as he slightly bent forward and smiled saying:

“This isn’t for revenge or anythin’, if that’s what you were worried about. I specifically needed of you to be here for my plan, but you’ll get back safe and sound as soon as I’m done. Promise.”

She blinked in confusion. That was... reassuring? He hadn’t exactly thought he would have spent so much effort in bringing a player if it were just for the sake of getting his revenge, but still, she hadn’t exactly...
him to bring her just for chats either. Neither expected him to be so... calm about all this mess. And she certainly hadn’t expected him to promise to someone he had literally just met. That could only mean that he was dead serious with this, but... wow. Must be pretty confident of his plan, at this point was a sign of great news, she reasoned.

“You’re...” She discreetly shook her head. Could put her thoughts back in order. “I’m surprised? Happy? Confused? I-I don’t know. I don’t seem to be taking it so well... I m-mean, you mad about all this? Not even a little?”

“nah... that’s not really my thing.” He just shook his head. Of course. “i mean, uh. as long as nobody blocks my path. takes me for an idiot and shakes the gun accidentally murdererin’ people like if it didn’t matter to them, that is.” His eye-sockets twitched in a funny way and he raised a sheepish grin. “so again for jumpin to conclusions.”

“Again, no worries.” she muttered with a strained smile, looking down.

“so, uh... i guess i was a bit mad when i figured i had not just one sicko to look out for but, few thousands or something. but... actually?
i saw that you literally had no idea what was on... it became pretty hard to be mad at any of them. His left hand went in the back of his skull and scratched the nape of his neck. The rattling sound made her shiver again and she forcefully closed her eyes and turned her head away.

"i mean, if you were just thinking that none of it was real and that you weren't hurting anybody then... heh. it just meant that no matter how bad things went down here... nobody was crazy enough to actually do it on purpose, y'know?"

He was smiling. It looked sad, but it also was a... serene smile. He almost looked... actually relieved.

Nonetheless, she simply could not return the expression. Part of her wanted to stop beating him about it because she had not actively contributed to his misery and because he was saying himself that it was so she feared that countering his opinion or talking too much about this topic could bring back the incongruous serenity of his and bring him back to reality, to feelings and all the potential trauma he had been through... But all at the same time, she simply could not understand how he had ever managed to reach a state of peace in the first place.

She was no psychologist, but... she was not sure
or not it was healthy for him.

Besides, as far as she knew, it could just be whether he wanted to fool the others or himself. Either way... this wouldn’t be the first time.

“Anyway. I guess you’re still wonderin’ what I’m doin’ here.” he said, as if he just remembered to had somewhat forgotten to answer this question or as if he just wanted to close their previous conversation and clumsily brushed the subject. “Might be time to actually answer that. Heh...

“You want to stop the Players from accessing the game... Right?”

He seemed surprised by her deduction, but soon expanded ever so slightly and she heard a forced laugh. He seemed impressed? He had complimented her observation skills, but it didn’t quite fit with his tone. Oh, wait. Maybe he was just taken aback by how predicted him so easily.

When she realized just how self-conscious he had since he knew just how much she knew about and himself, Dawn bit her tongue. Maybe she should watch her words and try to stop anticipating him every now and again. That was creepy.

“... I want to stop your actions in the game.
I want to stop your actions in the game, interfering here at least, that much’s for sure. I don’t know what consequences there’d be to your game, but... sorry, I just really don’t want to talk about that part. Heh.”

Yeah, she couldn’t exactly blame him for that. If Undertale became unusable due to his plan, the Undertale would whine about it for a while, but they wouldn’t. She vastly preferred taking a toy away from the than endangering actual lives.

“Anyway. That’s exactly what bringin’ you here for, supposes to do.”

“Yeah...? That’s the part I don’t exactly understand here.” She muttered uneasy. “I want to help course, but... What do you want me to do, exactly.”

“Well, the principle is that, as one of the players... now that you’re here, you have possibility to control the timeline however want. Basically.”

“W-we can only do that by pressing the game buttons though,” she replied anxiously. Did he her to have that ability naturally? “I don’t I could do any of that without having access to... the game’s not the problem. At least, not anymore. It’s use is totally been handled out.
he countered, shaking his skull calmly and so confidently while staring intently at her.

She stared back with a blank look. She was not really followed what he was implying here. She knew if she just happened to have the magical randomly warp time into infinite loops, would. And there was no way she would just like that dev power out of nowhere... Right?

Wait. If she was a player, and if she thought again Matrix logic... If he had arranged everything to here, he could probably have ‘programmed’ however he wanted. So maybe he just gave her the literally by typing numbers on a keyboard or some

“you know what makes human souls so strong, don’t you?” He had uttered this as a regular question, even if he explicitly stated that he knew the answer. Still, he continued: “determination. and let that yours, along with any of the other players’ much stronger than the average around her...

Oooor that. That could work too. It all came from ‘determination’, then...? Huh. Well she was a human course she was expected to have that to some extent according to the game’s lore.

“so now that you’re in a world where your so
She grumbled weakly, as her arm tried to blindly look for her blanket and pull it back to her side. What a nightmare she just had… Not only had it been ridiculous, it was purely terrifying as well. And annoying.

She really couldn’t find her blanket. Or her pillow, for that matter— whatever her head was lying on, that wasn’t her pillow. She was getting cold. So annoying.

... *Wait a minute.*

She opened her eyes in a start and stared down.

This wasn’t her bed either.

She saw a cold light in the distance. She stared.

*Definitely-Not-Sans* was sitting at the desk and had taped the flashlight back on top of the desk lamp so he could work on a huge messy pile of papers. Probably blueprints. She saw him wave a pen around and scratch the back of his skull with a rattling sound that made her shiver and she even thought she heard some grunting and mumbling at some point.

Until his movements went to a halt and he became stiff as a statue. *Very* slowly, she saw him turn his chair so he could face her. He looked annoyed.

“*oh. hey. you sure* like to take your time, uh?”

His head was now resting nonchalantly on his left hand, whose elbow was leisurely lying on the desk. She felt like he had tried and failed to sound friendly, but only his boredom and a reasonably
controlled irritation poorly wrapped into genuine sarcasm had been audible, in spite of his possible efforts.

The human rose a livid head, her expression stuck with shock and an ever growing fear as her jaw gaped open.

*Nope. Nope. Nope. Nope, nope, not happening, this is *not* happening…*

Sans rolled his eyes cynically.

“nope, i’m still here. not a dream.” he sighed, rubbing his forehead as if he were trying to avoid face-palming too openly. “now that this is finally settled, maybe we could just—”

“Y-You can’t be Sans… Ha-ha-ha, right…? I-It just doesn’t make sense, t-that’s physically i-impossible…”

It sounded as if he grinded his teeth, as he slowly but angrily stood up and started pacing threateningly towards her.

“*oh no you won’t. i don’t know how long you wanted to play this game, but I’ve had enough of it.*”

Her instincts screamed at her to jump out of the sofa and get the hell away from here, but her legs did not respond. Then again, the door had probably been locked again by now, so it wasn’t like she could have gone anywhere.

The skeleton’s left hand closed into a fist as if he had just taken a grip onto something.

She yelped as she immediately felt some kind of *pull* coming from her very deep chest, but as soon as he put his hand into motion, all she really managed to do afterwards was gasp in shock— and for breathable air, too.

The next instant, all she had time to realize was that she couldn’t feel the ground under her feet anymore— and that she was now stuck *floating in midair*, her face standing hardly one foot away from his.

Wow, now *that* escalated quickly! You done goofed, girl.

His eye flashed with rings of bright cyan ember trembling in the middle of an obscure endless void,
and his voice had seemed to sound even deeper than before. The right eye-socket was just pure darkness as its shape seemed to still enlarge itself in one round black hole.

Part of her wanted to scream, but her gawking mouth felt speechless and dry.

“He didn’t even flinch in response to that hysterical shriek, instead slightly narrowing his shadowed bony pseudo-eyebrows. Unlike before when all that could be seen of his face was some vague pale silhouette under the electric shades of the torchlight, this time his entire features were somehow lit from below by a ghastly deep watery halo quivering between them.

Although his tone sounded calmer, for once his ever stuck smile seemed eerily in place as his left iris stabilized to an abysmal azure shade throwing daggers all around.

“at first i thought you were just being stupid. maybe you are. i mean, you did make a VERY dumb mistake.” The grip in his left glowing fist tightened and the pain in her chest doubled, making her yelp in surprise following the feeling of this ever narrowing constriction. “You REALLY must’ve got some guts to take me for an idiot, especially when you already know as much as you do.”

“I DON’T EVEN KNOW WHAT THE HELL YOU’RE TALKING ABOUT!”

He frowned more. His grip tightened more. Whatever that was that she could now feel pounding in her chest, that was huge, that was flashing dark blue, and that was hurting. It felt as if someone had somehow managed to hang her by her heart and it was doing its best to keep pounding at a wild rate as if it were about to free itself from her ribcage.

It hurt. He was furious and he was scary and it hurt.

“you already know this, but a long time ago… i promised that if any human came through the door leading to the ruins, then i’d have to protect them.” No matter how impossible it was supposed to be, she felt as if his smile had somehow grown even larger. His eye suddenly stopped glowing, although he still maintained a strong magical hold on her. “But you technically didn’t come through that door, did you?”

“PLEASE I’LL DO ANYTHING JUST PUT ME DOWN!”
This time however, he did stop; if only for a split second.

His hand faintly lowered, even if his grip was still keeping his prey at a reasonable distance from the ground.

The human was forcefully trying to curl up in on herself in some kind of ridiculous malformed ball of flesh, still floating in midair, with a dark blue halo flashing and trembling in the middle of her chest. Her shaking hands wrapped around her head and covered her ears, while her eyes were forcedly closed and tearing apart in weak cries slightly twinkling in the dim light.

For some strange reason, at this instant, Sans started to feel that something really was wrong; as if internally he knew that any other normal human was not meant to react that badly.

He had obviously meant to give her a scare; but given the type of human this was; given that even the dumbest of these players were able to predict any of the game’s characters’ behaviors at least to some extent, and given the incredibly exhaustive knowledge she herself had proven to hold… Shouldn’t she have expected him to react similarly to this? Shouldn’t she have seen this coming?

She had proven to be quite the sassy and resourceful kid, and a pretty observant one at that, easily to the point of actually becoming dangerous if she started jumping to conclusions and going back to that ‘paranoia mode’ of hers. Sure, he had seen her shaking and stuttering even during his first conversation with her, but even when her fear was obvious, he had simply assumed that she was the type of person who would sneakily bite back in the case of danger, just like what she had done the last time.

This radical change of behavior was deeply disconcerting, to say the least. He first tried to dismiss this impression as he reasoned that she was probably faking such over-the-top response so he would let his guard down and hesitate at the worst moment, if only for an instant— but the feeling would only get stronger the longer he was staring at this pitiful view, and the fact that her soul was plain visible and fully within his grasp only made her true feelings all the more obvious.

This was not the expression of a calculating liar crying crocodile tears.

“Put me down” she repeated again and again in a shaking and desperately imploring voice, “put me down, put-me-down please put-me-down ooh put-me-down-I’m-so-sorry-but-oh-my-God-put-me-down…”

His eye-sockets closed as he sighed tensely. As much as he remained deeply annoyed by the time
they were wasting, his anger was simply and effectively defeated by his surprise and confusion, and his hand carefully sent the crybaby back in place on the couch, before he released his grasp. Act or not, it was now definite that pushing her that way would lead nowhere. So much for trying to have her spill the beans.

For the next few seconds, he stood in front of her, waiting for the right moment to finally start explaining his plans or just begin an actual conversation… But the kid would not stop crying and shaking, even though he could tell that she was trying her best to calm down on her own.

… Well. That was awkward.

“uhh… ok, maybe i pushed it a bit too far, and i’m still a little mad at you for lying to me about this game thing… but that stuff doesn’t even matter in the end, so… i mean, uh, what with you knowing even more about the game than I do… i thought it was obvious that i was mostly messin’ with ya. mostly.”

Yeah, it really wasn’t.

He watched as the fleshy ball kept trembling and sobbing for about one or two more minutes, and he eventually brought his rolling chair along as soon as his laziness told him that he was getting bored. He could hear the brat mutter distorted words sounding like some awkward apologies, but it took a while before she finally pulled her crimson head away from her arms and struggled to actually meet him in the eyes.

Or at least, she just tried to stare back at the pair of white glowing pellets glaring at her, given the fact that the only source of light available was once more only that of the little faraway torchlight, sitting on top of the desk located at least a dozen feet away from them. From that distance she could still somewhat imagine the skeleton’s outlines under the dim cold light, but it only sharpened his features through dancing ghastly reflections on his skull.

Once more, Sans was slightly taken aback for a half second upon seeing the expression on her face. If this wasn’t just some incredibly convincing act, then the genuine message it read was crystal clear:

For some reason, it almost appeared as if the mere fact of looking at him was actually painful.

He had seen fear. He knew what fear looked like.

This definitely was something else.
“… Sans.” was all she eventually managed to whisper in a broken voice that still somewhat struggled to hide her terror, to no avail.

“you’re still on to that?” he lifted his nonexistent eyebrows with a cynical mock-surprise. “i figured you’d have realized when you were hangin’ around in the air. or, uh. back to when we met around, what, an hour ago by now?”

She clumsily pushed her way back into the depths of the sofa (and almost lost her balance in the process), as she apparently tried to increase the distance between them as much as it was physically possible.

Then she looked down and trembled again.

“I-I really didn’t. S-sorry. I m-must’ve looked stupid…”

“pretty much.” he nodded in a mockingly solemn way.

The awkward silence resumed. He heard her sniffle and try to recompose herself, but it was obvious that she still looked deeply shaken. Sans thought about all the things he wanted to explain, but after a few more seconds…

He decided that maybe that could wait a little, as he gave in and sighed. Maybe they both needed a time-out, after all. There was so much a serious existential-crisis-inducing conversation could do, especially under such circumstances.

“… look. i get it, you know…? i took you from wherever you used to be and got you here while you never asked for anythin’, you had no idea that this game you used to play was actually alive or whatever…” He shrugged and took an audible, genuinely calm breath. “must be pretty freaky to have the truth hammered onto you like that. t’was hard for me, too.”

She slowly raised a pair of red swollen eyes towards him, silently watching him with a mixture between fear, sadness and… was this some actual, genuine compassion? He didn’t seem to be paying her any attention though, as he hardly gave her a glance, and sighed instead.

“but in the end, ok. maybe it wasn’t the same kind of shock. since, um,” he sent her an awkward grin and looked as if he was sincerely making a joke, “i’m not the one who used to take over a child’s body and slaughter everyone in sight literally because it’s a game and you’re doing it for fun. heh eh.”
The girl’s head was slowly buried in her arms as her cheeks reddened in embarrassment and guilt.

…*Ouch. I never even played the game to begin with, but OUCH.*

She was trying to take deep breaths, slowly taking in the consequences of these events.

Undertale was real. The Resets were real, if the video game she knew really was controlling this world. A Genocide Route had been attempted at some point and Sans remembered it. Did he remember it because he somehow could remember the Resets, or because it was the Route he had just been through? As far as the theories deduced, the actual canon game evidence pointed towards the fact that Sans could not remember the Resets, so…

She shivered. That only left them with the second option.

Sans had kidnapped her because she was about to play Undertale herself, so it meant that the Players were responsible for multiple bad things occurring in this world. Definitely the Resets. Maybe even more than ‘just’ that.

She lowered her eyes and buried a little more her head in her arms, deep in thought.

If she was getting things straight, then the most obvious part was that somehow, the game was real. It affected sentient people, and not just meaningless sprites and code with predetermined dialogues and actions to follow without any hint of actual individual thought into it.

The players were not toying with pixels, but with real lives. The reason why their dialogue could be always the same, yet so easily changed by the subtest shifts in the player’s actions, was because they couldn’t remember the Resets, thus were prone to simply repeat their actions whenever time itself was rewound and they were confronted repeatedly to the same circumstances over and over.

It made no sense, but when facing this specific kind of context, it seemed to be the only thing that would make sense. Sans’s dialogue here sure was a lot more adaptable than in any regular simulation she could imagine, and he sure had felt physically tangible enough when he grabbed her that last time, thank you very much.

… And yet, there still was something that prevented this all from sounding truly real to her. She had entirely put aside the ‘dream’ option by now, but still— something was amiss.

For all she knew, the original video game made it clear that their lives were still led by numbers, and the fandom took it as canon too for the most part— because it was. It was canon that they were literally living in a video game. Monsters and humans alike had “LOVE” and “EXP”, their basic attacks followed predetermined patterns (it was canon that monsters could somehow be offered “patterns” as presents), their fights were turn-based and their actions were apparently confined within the sole limit of ‘their’ turn, and their physical abilities depended on statistics such as “HP”,
“ATK” and “DEF.” A real world that truly made sense would not accept such things to develop alongside its regular laws of physics. Even just the Resets thing itself— she enjoyed sci-fi stories and theories, but for all she knew, time travel was just impossible.

So even if they were truly sentient and deserved basic respect and rights as real characters people, it didn’t necessarily make them physically real. Their world and its mechanics simply wouldn’t make sense otherwise, if it were just as real as her own.

In a way, it was… almost reassuring. This world wasn’t her own, but it was still a lot more predictable, and familiar. She would have to adjust to quite a few things of course, but logically, she should soon find her way through, right? Both this world and its inhabitants felt real, but she simply had to remember that they could not possibly be anything but some sort of virtual simulation. Like in The Matrix! Yes. As realistic and sentient they would all seem, Sans and all the others just had to be some sorts of futuristic artificial intelligences. Very, very elaborate and actually sentient artificial intelligences apparently able to feel actual emotions and having real virtual lives and families and human (?) moralities. Hahahahaha.

That wouldn’t prevent her from treating them like fully real people of course, because even if they weren’t real according to the physical aspect, they still were on the ethical one— and thus, they certainly didn’t deserve to go through all that mess the video game and its players apparently put on them.

… That still was one heck of a messed up situation.

Which led her to wonder… How had he reacted, upon learning by himself that his world wasn’t real? How had he managed to bring someone real on the physical plane inside a (supposedly?) virtual place? Was it just like in the movie The Matrix, and this body she was controlling right now and that looked like her own was, in fact, nothing more than a part of the simulation itself?

That might explain some things, maybe, like how Sans was able to… Had he turned her “SOUL” blue?

Whatever was that thing that she could feel beating at a steady rate inside her chest (and that didn’t actually feel like her regular heart), it sure had never been there before. It had never made itself known, at least. It had to be specific to this ‘virtual body’ she must have gained upon arriving in this virtual world… Now that she was thinking about it, she wondered what her in-game stats could be. After all, if she now had a SOUL in the Undertale meaning of the word, then it had to mean that she had her own stats as well, right? Would she have 20 HP too?

She tried not to think too hard about it. Thinking about HP made her think about taking damage and facing game overs, and she really didn’t look forward to that possibility.

Then again… Why had she been brought here? Her being in this world meant that Sans had found
a plan in order to solve his problems, and that he was about to put it to motion. And she probably was expected to have some sort of role to play in it, too.

Then again… Sans? Sans was the one who gave up so long ago… What made things so different this time? What happened to his legendary laziness? Did it go on a vacation or something?

“… still.” he eventually added, sighing tiredly. “i was just thinkin’. it would’ve been nice if you could. y’know. at least admit what you did. and not just pretend you never played the game or whatever.”

His tone did not sound particularly grave, but the serious look in his empty eye-sockets was talkative enough on its own. The human only gave him a pair of confused eyes in response, frowning in a puzzled pout. He didn’t really seem to care, as if he were certain that against what her body language said, she knew exactly what he was talking about.

“i mean, i know you didn’t really do it on purpose. i’m not actually blamin’ you for anything, ‘cause i’m pretty sure you wouldn’t’ve done it if you knew you were hurtin’ real people. but that still happened. so… i really just expected at least a ‘sorry’ or somethin’. y’know. for courtesy.”

“Wait… W-when you said I was lying, you thought…” Her face blanched as she started to feel nauseated. “B-but that wasn’t a lie, I swear! It really was—”

“kid, if you wanted to convince me that you really never did anything wrong, you should’ve tried harder than that.”

She sent him a persistent and bewildered blank look.

After a few seconds during which they simply held that staring contest as if their silence could bend the argument in their favor, Sans eventually gave in. Why did all humans always have to be so unanimously determined even when there was no point to it whatsoever?

“ok, let me put it down more clearly for you.” he eventually sighed in defeat, rolling his eyes in annoyance and slowly standing up as he started walking towards his desk. “y’see, the way i brought you here? ‘f course it was related to the game so i could find your computer’s coordinates. but that’s not all. i wanted to avoid some kinds of accidents, y’see, like inadvertently taking someone who was playing for the first time and had no idea what this whole mess was about, besides not having done anything to us yet. that wouldn’t’ve been fair.” he shrugged heavily. “so i’d made sure that the player i’d get would be someone who was about to start a very specific type of run. one that newcomers aren’t supposed to play or even know about.” His white pupils pierced
her like daggers as he narrowed his eye-sockets. “if you’re here, it means you know exactly WHICH run i’m talking about. Since it’s the one you were about to go through.”

She realized that she did. As she tried to imagine how he could have used specific programming-related triggers to select his target, and as she remembered that she had been kidnapped before she had even been given the chance to take any action whatsoever in the game, she realized that the best way to actually create a trigger was to choose something that was constant in the game, and that could only occur in a very limited number of ways.

For example: naming the Fallen Human.

No matter the name given, anyone could go through the same diversity of choices. All names could lead to either Pacifist or Genocide routes, without excluding any of the Neutrals that went in-between. Sans couldn’t possibly predict that a player would automatically go through one route or another before they even had time to meet the first monster in the game.

However… there was a very special name that led to very special consequences.

“so let me recap.” he continued. “you show some extensive knowledge about the game’s details that even i had no idea about, you try to play the game on hard mode, and when you arrive here you have the gall to tell me that you NEVER played before because you SUCK at video games? you must really have some nerve to keep pretending your story makes any sense whatsoever by now.”

She opened her mouth to object. She left it open for a second or two, but no sound came out. Her eyes gradually lowered as her lips slowly closed and pursed in an embarrassed pout.

“… O-okay, w-when you put it like that I see what you mean.” She gulped. He was mad, she could tell. What would happen if he was mad? Would he attack again? She panicked. “B-but look, I swear I didn’t…! uh…”

“kid. stop. you’re just embarrassing yourself, now.” He sounded like he was grinding his teeth again. “trust me, i’m trying REALLY hard to not get mad at you ‘cause i know it’s pointless, but you’re NOT making it easy.”

… Of course he wouldn’t trust her. He had made his point clear, after all. He could joke, but he was also a very rational and analytical guy when it came to his thinking. She reasoned that in his place, she probably would have gone through a similar conclusion herself.
And yet he was wrong. Not because there was a flaw in his deduction. But because he simply lacked some pieces of evidence that completely changed the story. This situation made her think back of her best friend’s absolute favorite video game, where evidence was everything and even the smallest detail could turn the situation around in an instant. Could she do something similar? Was there anything around her that could prove her claims?

She realized that there was. She did have her cell phone with her. Didn’t she? She discreetly slid her hand in her jeans’ back pocket. It was there. A sigh of relief escaped her, although it didn’t leave her any less tense.

She raised a determined look back at him. Although her shivers went back as soon as her eyes caught sight of his face again, she tried to maintain her stance for as long as she could manage.

This was Sans. He was scary, but he was alive, and even if he was mad, she knew him pretty well. Maybe even more than himself to some extent…? She did not want to think too much about that part.

“I… L-look, I sup-pose you r-really don’t t-trust me, but…” She gulped and forcibly closed her eyes, clenching her fists. “If I can prove it. Will you listen?”

He raised a nonexistent eyebrow in what appeared to be confusion and surprise. Under different circumstances, it could have seemed like he looked actually amused, but this time he probably was just even more annoyed.

After a few more seconds of looking at her up and down, studying her every details as if he were looking for evidence in her demeanor that she was playing him again, he appeared to give in once more.

“… heh. why the heck not. maybe you’ll get a laugh outta me if you’re good.” But then he widened his sockets and his white glowing pupils disappeared. “You’d better not be wasting my time, though.” Of course he’d want to pull that one to intimidate her and of course she had seen it coming but of course it was extremely effective nonetheless.

His pupils came back immediately, even though he still looked deeply annoyed. He was supposed to look much less scary that way, but somehow it didn’t stop her shivers and she had to force her eyes closed and steady herself in order to try to regain her calm.

He crossed his arms in contempt and flumped down in his chair. The sudden motion made its little wheels reel back a few feet away, but he quickly stopped it by stomping his foot on the ground and he grunted quietly in response, mumbling curses against the laws of conservation of kinetic energy. His eyes went from staring at the floor with irritation to focusing on her face, sending her a death
glare.

“humor me.”

His impatient and menacing tone showed that she would definitely not be given a second chance. In fact, she understood that she should feel extremely lucky she had even been given a single chance at all. And her time was already running out.

While she would have preferred having been graced with at least a few more seconds of reflection under other circumstances so she could fully prepare her actions and better calculate the results, it felt obvious that pushing her luck would have been suicidal (she did not want to know whether she should have meant it in a metaphorical or literal way).

So she immediately reached for her phone and pulled it out, quickly turning it on and opening one of its applications. After a few calculated movements of her thumb over the screen, she shakily rose up from the sofa and extended her arm as far as it could stretch, handing her little device for the skeleton to see. For the first few seconds, he refused to move and looked at her in an apathetic manner; but he quickly seemed to ponder his options and eventually decided to take it. Maybe because he would take it as a chance to mess with it or find some information regarding humans or her world, she realized.

… He still looked unimpressed, though.

“what am i looking at?”

“It’s. I-it’s my phone.”

Sans stared with some suddenly renewed interest at the little object he was keeping between his left bony fingers, turning it around and looking at it through various angles.

“That looks… pretty different from the phones i know. huh.” He played a bit more with it, weighing it in his palm and looking at its white back. “hm. fancy.”

“Y-yeah, it’s a p-pretty common model where I come from…” she rambled uneasily, laughing awkwardly and rubbing her arms. “I-I guess that when you… I-I mean, uh. It just, must’ve come with me. I suppose. Since I… always keep it around me at all times.”

He nodded and hummed again, absorbed in his thoughts as if he were contemplating what
possibilities this tiny piece of technology could bring him. Still, he quickly lowered his hand on his lap and went back to glare at her warily.

“anyway. what’s it supposed to prove exactly?”

“I-it’s on the app.” she explained. “It’s a conversation I had with my friends. R-right before you… b-before I arrived here.”

His eye-sockets twitched, but he quickly gave another glance at the phone’s screen and saw words and lots of colors and images. Yep, it looked pretty much like some sort of chatroom.

She was still standing between the couch and his chair, but now she started regretting that she was not back to sitting on it. Part of her wanted to sink into it and become one with the furniture so she could stop feeling so anxious and cold.

Usually she was one of the most patient people her friends and relatives knew; but one thing that could break that patience was dread. When she could feel that her fate could very well depend on how he was about to interpret her arguments, she rationalized that she had no other choice but to at least try to actively plead for her cause.

“L-look… Full story is, it was a bet. Okay? It was j-just a joke between my friends, and it’s been going on for months. At first I never even wanted to play! I mean, I wasn’t completely against the idea b-but I just thought it wasn’t w-worth trying, so… It’s just th-that today my best friend found a way to make me, and…”

Sans kept flipping through the messages, hardly listening to her. He was completely still. If it weren’t for his left thumb brushing the screen from time to time, he just might have been mistaken for a statue.

@BlueDoppler: This is FINALLY happening, guys. I’m not even kidding.

@Calliope Quill: Now I’m the lost one. What have we been apparently ”hyping” for exactly?

@BlueDoppler: Dawn. She’s finally doing it.

He carried on brushing through the screen. He wondered how that technology could work, that was
truly fascinating. Monsterkind had only ever known phones with actual buttons, so the concept of the screen being a unique yet ever-changing button all by itself was a complete novelty to him. He would have been interested in potentially opening that thing and observing how things worked inside of it.

Alphys would probably have been even more interested than he already was. She would probably be obsessed over it for a few days. Find magical adaptations to that human technology in order to improve the daily life in the Underground or something.

“It r-really wasn’t that bad at first. It was just a joke between us because, we’ve been friends for months, and we talked about Undertale almost all the time, and they were all like, ‘You can’t be a real Undertale fan if you don’t play’, and I kept refusing to play for the sake of the joke, so, at some point… It had just become some silly game between us, and the first one who’d manage to make me play would win something or whatever. But Lys…”

@WinDows Gulim: Oh Glob, I’m so proud of you right now. How did you do it?

@BlueDoppler: Sometimes blackmail is for the greater good =)

The human had started to pace awkwardly in the room. He raised a bit his skull back towards her, still with a tense look, although this time it was for a different reason.

He did just read the word “blackmail”, in a completely casual conversation at that. She had said that the people hiding behind these logs were her friends, and the context did make it sound like it was just meant to be taken as a joke — and the human he had right in front of him seemed to have taken it as a joke as well, at first. But… maybe “blackmail” wasn’t something to take so lightly when it could have such unexpected yet serious consequences.

“S-she cheated. So I didn’t want to play by the rules either. I was about to get my butt kicked anyway as soon as I’d start playing, so I just thought, why not give them exactly what they want, right? I wanted to keep the Hard Mode as a surprise and see how long it’d take them to notice. I-I mean they didn’t want me to actually play the game because we already all knew what the story was all about, we all just wanted to have a good laugh together, so I-I thought— I just th-thought I’d give them a good show, okay…?”

@Pineapplup: … °sigh° I guess I don’t have a choice uh.

@Yoshua: no u don’t :p
She had ended up as his target because of a stupid teenager game. Not even because she had wanted to play *Undertale* on her own volition. Well, she had admitted that maybe she *had* wanted to give it a try herself at some point, and maybe she *would* have played under other conditions, but… She *did* tell him the truth.

Sans lowered the phone and raised his skull to look at her. She looked like she was trying to keep her composure and her pacing act had surely been an attempt from her to control her anxiousness by releasing its energy in one form or another, but her entire body was shaking and her eyes were getting watery again. She looked like she was certain he wasn’t listening to her. Or caring to listen. Whoops.

“… you gotta be kiddin.” he eventually whispered, face-palming and muffling some embarrassed laugh.

She jumped at the sound of his voice, and her shaky legs almost seemed to give in for a second. Wow, he *really* had given her a much more serious scare than he had anticipated, hadn’t he…?

She turned towards him quickly, pivoting on her feet in one swift movement, although it was more because of a feeling of dread rather than an actual voluntary effect from her part. She looked like she could hardly believe what she had heard, and was now staring at him just to make sure that she hadn’t dreamed. He gave her a sheepish grin.

“ok. wow. i uh… wasn’t expectin that. never thought that sort of thing could… what even are the odds?”

“I-I know, right…?” she laughed in bewilderment. This was surreal. Maybe she had fainted again and this was all just a dream.

“well. uh.” He stared down at her phone and realized that he was still holding on to it. He also realized that he might have scrolled a little too far through the chat, because the application had seemed to freeze as it showed an error message. Something about not having any Wi-Fi connection available. Sighing, he quickly raised his arm towards her. “here. you might want that back.”

She merely stared at his hand in disbelief. When she noticed he wasn’t moving, she realized that he actually expected her to take it. So she swiftly raised a shaking arm and seized it by a corner between two fingers, then retracted her arm twice as fast.
“Yeah... Big misunderstanding, huh...?” she laughed awkwardly, looking away.

“... yeah. sorry.” He sighed again, looking away as well. “I thought the only type of person who’d have any interest in lying to me about ever playin the game were the ones who did... real bad things when they were in control. so i just... assumed that you were one of them.”

... So that's what that was all about.

He thought she had gone through the Genocide Run and that she had tried to lie to him in order to evade the guilt of having murdered everyone.

Maybe he had thought that she was responsible for the timeline they were in right at the moment, if her hypothesis that they were currently stuck in the aftermath of a (failed) Genocide Run was true.

Maybe he even had thought that her denying that he could possibly be real had just been another act from her part and that she had known all along and just tried to... whatever it was he had thought her motives for doing something so stupid could have been.

No wonder he had been so mad!

“so. uh... i guess i should be the one to apologize now? ‘specially for earlier...”

“D-don’t worry about it.” she muttered by reflex. “I understand. I’m. Just glad that’s settled.”

“heh... if you say so.” He paused for a small moment, looking to the side; but after a split second, he gave her a dorky grin. “uh... h-how about we start over and pretend this never happened?”

She saw a bony hand raise towards her in a jolt, and she shivered. She stared at it for a few seconds, before shaking herself out of her trance and staring at him instead.

He saw her timidly raise her left arm to shake his, but her hand was quaking and he was certain her face wasn’t supposed to look that white. Instead of shaking his hand in return though, she suddenly retracted hers and rolled it around her legs, burying her head between her knees.

“I’d like that.” She smiled shyly and gave him a weak and sheepish glance, but her tone was genuine.
Sans watched her behavior with a puzzled look, but he simply shrugged and brought his arm back onto his lap with a light chuckle. Was she shy or scared that he’d pull the whoopee cushion prank?

“I’m, uh. Dawn, by the way.”

“yeah, they mentioned your name on that thing.” he nodded vaguely. “i would introduce myself too, but… you know how it is.”

They both laughed. Then stopped. That was awkward.

The human lowered her gaze, resting her chin on her knees and wrapping her arms around them. Sans saw her send him some quick glances, but she would never speak up. At some point he tried to encourage her to say what she had in mind, and although she seemed reluctant, she eventually gulped and sent him a sad and empathetic look.

“I was wondering… For how long have you known…?”

“about the game? well…” He sighed deeply, staring at the void. “it’s hard to keep track of time from this side, y’know, so i don’t think i could give you a real answer. still, i really found out that you guys existed pretty recently, i’ll admit…” he shrugged.

She looked down.

“but, uh, when you see that time keeps jumpin’ back and forth and that the only thing that changes between loops is that the kid does some weird new stuff every time, it’s not too hard to figure that something’s not right with’em. that something… took over at some point.” A stiff chuckle burst from him, but it was quickly silenced. “y’know, it would’ve been much faster if the game weren’t erasing most of my research every time one of you wanted to play. it gets old to try to keep up and redo everything from scratch. makes you want to just give up after a certain point.”

Yeah… That part wasn’t really new, but there still was a huge difference between thinking of it as a fictional character’s depressing demise nobody could do anything about, and… actually facing said fictional character voicing this very same situation.
“… Wait a minute.” She gave him a shocked and desperately horrified look. “Are y-you implying that you can remember the Resets?”

“the what?” He raised a non-existent eyebrow in intense confusion. The befuddled face she made probably made him realize that she actually expected him to know, so he thought a little more about it. “oh… wait. did you mean ‘time jump’? t-that’s how we’ve been callin’ them down here, heh eh.”

She blinked in deep puzzlement. That was… new.

Then again, she didn’t specifically remember the word ‘Reset’ having been used in the game at any other point than the main menu or Flowey’s dialogue, so maybe she was just influenced by headcanons and alternate versions. She hadn’t watched an actual playthrough in a while, so her memory was fuzzy when it came to telling apart ‘canon’ and ‘fanon’ regarding such minor details in terminology.

“Well, uh… Y-yeah. That’s how we refer to it in the game, and, i-in general too. It’s a ‘Reset’ when you restart the game from the beginning, and it’s a ‘Reload’ if you go back to the last SAVE file, but don’t actually erase all of your progress in the game.”

“… that does make it sound like it’s a video game thing alright. yikes.”

Maybe that explained why they wouldn’t have thought of using such term, or even been reluctant to, if they ever considered the option. Since, under their perspective, it wasn’t a video game.

Ugh…

“anyway, to answer your question… yeah. not always been the case, but at some point i managed to manually save my memories, so now i keep’em every time there’s a, uh, ‘reset’, as you say.”

“The game…” She stopped there and bit her lip, looking down. But when Sans gave her a silent nod to ask her to continue, she took a short breath. “The game made it look like you couldn’t remember. I just… I had no idea. We had no idea that this was…”

He had been trapped all this time. She used to think that all these scenarios where he would keep track of everything and never be happy because of old memories and traumatisms were just the material of fanfiction and drama-inducing stories the fandom had made up, but…

The worst part was. Since nobody had ever noticed him going off script at any point. Was he
just… literally playing his part over and over? Why? Was he afraid of what would happen to him if the ‘Anomaly’ realized that he was out of the loop? She did remember having read a few stories where Sans was given even more attention and misery on purpose, just because he could remember everything but couldn’t do anything… Was that it?

This only made her feel even sadder for him, because she was certain that if he had gone off-script and that anyone noticed… This would have had much bigger consequences than he could imagine, that much was true; but she was convinced that instead of leading to consequences against him… It would only have made the players realize sooner. Maybe his situation could have been solved earlier if he had just… let them know.

But then again… How could he have given them any trust at all, after what they had done?

“heh… don’t worry about it. i mean, ok that sucked more than you could imagine. but… it’ll be over soon, now. that’s why i brought you here.”

Right. He had a plan. And the plan involved using a ‘player’ to some extent… What for, though? He had yet to say anything about it, he hadn’t even gotten started or looked in any rush… Could his plan be already foiled since he discovered that she had never played? No, no, he just said that he was confident he could still end the problem. But then again… what was his plan? Did it have something to do with her being now a part of the game and getting her own in-game ‘SOUL’ and game stats…? Wait, was that it? Did he want to do something with her soul?

Maybe she had appeared to become a little too nervous or even fearful, because the skeleton continued, this time in a much more anxious tone:

“whoa hey, don’t start gettin’ the wrong idea.” He had immediately raised his hands in defense and tried to wave them in a pacifying way. He took a short break, then lowered them and laid them on his lap, as he slightly bent forward and smiled slightly. “this isn’t for revenge or anythin’, if that’s what you were worried about. i specifically needed one of you to be here for my plan, but you’ll get to go back safe and sound as soon as i’m done. promise.”

She blinked in confusion. That was… reassuring? Well, she hadn’t exactly thought he would have spent too much effort in bringing a player if it were just for the sake of getting his revenge, but still, she hadn’t exactly expected him to bring her just for chats either. Neither had she expected him to be so… calm about all this mess.

And she certainly hadn’t expected him to promise anything to someone he had literally just met. That could only mean that he was dead serious with this, but… wow. He really must be pretty confident of his plan, at this point. Which was a sign of great news, she reasoned.
“You’re…” She discreetly shook her head so she could put her thoughts back in order. “I’m just… surprised? Happy? Confused? I-I don’t know. You s-seem to be taking it so well… I m-mean, you’re not mad about all this? Not even a little?”

“nah… that’s not really my thing.” He just shrugged. Of course. “i mean, uh. as long as nobody blatantly takes me for an idiot and shakes the guilt of accidentally murderin’ people like if it didn’ matter to them, that is.” His eye-sockets twitched in a funny way and he raised a sheepish grin. “s-sorry again for jumpin to conclusions.”

“Again, no worries.” she muttered with a shy strained smile, looking down.

“so, uh… i guess i was a bit mad when i figured that i had not just one sicko to look out for but, like, a few thousands or something. but… actually? when i saw that you literally had no idea what was going on… it became pretty hard to be mad at any of you.”

His left hand went in the back of his skull and scratched his neck. The rattling sound made her shiver again and she forcefully closed her eyes and turned her head away.

“i mean, if you were just thinking that none of it was real and that you weren’t hurting anybody, then… heh. it just meant that no matter how bad things went down here… nobody was crazy enough to actually do it on purpose, y’know?”

He was smiling. It looked sad, but it also was a… strangely serene smile. He almost looked… actually relieved?

Nonetheless, she simply could not return the same expression. Part of her wanted to stop beating herself up about it because she had not *actively* contributed to his misery and because he was saying himself that it was over, so she feared that countering his opinion or even just talking too much about this topic could break this incongruous serenity of his and bring him back to a storm of feelings and all the potential trauma he had been through… But all at the same time, she simply could hardly understand how he had ever managed to reach this state of peace in the first place.

She was no psychologist, but… she was not sure whether or not it was healthy for him.

Besides, as far as she knew, it *could* just be a mask, whether he wanted to fool the others or himself.

Either way… this wouldn’t be the first time.

“anyway. i guess you’re still wonderin’ what you’re doin here.” he said, as if he just remembered
that he had somewhat forgotten to answer this question… or as if he just wanted to close their previous conversation and clumsily brushed the subject aside. “might be time to actually answer that. heh.”

“You want to stop the Players from accessing the game… Right?”

He seemed surprised by her deduction, but soon his smile expanded ever so slightly and she heard a forced chuckle. He seemed impressed? He had complimented her over her observation skills, but it didn’t quite fit with his tone…

Oh, wait. Maybe he was just taken aback by how she had predicted him so easily.

When she realized just how self-conscious he had to be since he knew just how much she knew about the game and himself, Dawn bit her tongue. Maybe she should watch her words and try to stop anticipating his actions every now and again. That was creepy.

“… i want to stop your actions in the game from interfering here at least, that much’s for sure. i don’t know what consequences there’d be for your game, but, uh… sorry, i just really don’t care about that part. heh.”

Yeah, she couldn’t exactly blame him for that. If the game became unusable due to his plan, the Undertale fandom would whine about it for a while, but they would live.

She vastly preferred taking a toy away from them rather than endangering actual lives.

“anyway. that’s exactly what bringin’ you here was supposed to do.”

“Yeah…? That’s the part I don’t exactly understand here.” she muttered uneasily. “I want to help, of course, but… What do you want me to do, exactly?”

“well, the principle is that, as one of those players… now that you’re here, you have the possibility to control the timeline however you want. basically.”

“W-we can only do that by pressing the game’s buttons though,” she replied anxiously. Did he expect her to have that ability naturally? “I don’t think I could do any of that without having access to the—”

“the game’s not the problem. at least, not anymore.” he countered, shaking his skull calmly and smirking confidently while staring intently at her.
She stared back with a blank look. She was not sure she really followed what he was implying here. She would know if she just happened to have the magical ability to randomly warp time into infinite loops, wouldn’t she? And there was no way she would just like that develop that power out of nowhere… Right?

Wait. If she was a player, and if she thought again of all this Matrix logic… If he had arranged everything to bring her here, he could probably have ‘programmed’ her stats however he wanted. So maybe he just gave her that ability literally by typing numbers on a keyboard or something…?

“you know what makes human souls so special, don’t you?” He had uttered this as a regular question, even if he explicitly stated that he knew the answer. Still, he continued: “determination. and let’s say that yours, along with any of the other players, is much stronger than the average around here.”

… Oooor that. That could work too. It all came down to ‘determination’, then…? Huh. Well she was a human, so of course she was expected to have that to some extent according to the game’s lore.

“so now that you’re in a world where your soul has an actual physicality…” His look intensified, as he glared at her and made sure to catch her full attention. “you should be strong enough to steal power from the game itself.”

Read via Screenshots Here (full formatting but may encounter loading issues)

Chapter End Notes

I'm trying to make a point of not publishing chapters longer than 10,000 words, because I know that this is one thing that for some reason I have trouble NOT doing. Still, I understand that even though you usually come here to read in the first place, everybody can have an indigestion pretty fast :/ So... I can't make too many promises, but whenever I notice that my chapters are getting extra long and I can find a way to cut them, I will. Hence the "Scene 2.1" in the title. The next chapter won't be Scene 3, but "Scene 2.2", aka the end of Scene 2.
Act 1, Scene 2.2

Learn When to Quit

— Act 1 —

Don’t Let Him Find Out

Scene 2.2

» Read the PDF version here! «

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This is the main index where you can choose which way you wish to read the chapter.

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Read Plain Text Here (formatting limited to what AO3 can do)
“so now that you’re in a world where your senses have an actual physicality... you should be strong enough to steal power from the game itself.”

She gasped in silence, but then kept this air inside her lungs as she found herself unable to release it. Each thing had seemed to fall into place, to such extent and velocity, she started to feel nauseated. After a few seconds though, she slowly calmed down, suddenly she repressed a burst of cynical laughter of course not, there simply was no way. She would be determined enough. Not her. He would never buy that one. Hilarious. What made him think that?

He seemed to be completely certain of what he was doing, so she was willing to believe him; but the mere thought of thinking of herself as ‘determined’ felt... strange. She could stand her ground when necessary, but... that was not much it. She was nowhere as determined as the game seemed to define the word as.

“I... wow.”

She took a few seconds to blink repeatedly and her thoughts back in order. She was particularly on
learn *how* he could have learned about the power of the ‘player’s’ soul without having ever seen one before.

Alphys had needed to see human souls directly in order to learn just about the *existence* of determination, but how did he do it without even having any player anyway? As far as she knew, he definitely hadn’t kidnapped anyone else before her in order to dissect their soul. The thought of such thing made her feel sick. Good thing she really couldn’t figure him doing anything like this.

“So... I can Reset. Okay.” She still needed to hear herself say it in order to fully believe it, although she kept lowering her head and blinking at the thought. “But... What’s the next step? Why did you, uh... take me that power to begin with?”

She heard him chuckle again: apparently, it pleased him to have her ask so many questions. He turned his head, used it to point towards the end of the room, but he could say anything, he seemed to realize that the basement was still stuck in the dark, they couldn’t see what he was trying to point at.

“... hm. does the, ah, ‘game’, tell you anything?”

“An old machine that’s supposed to be in this room.”

“Oh! You mean you’re going to fix it?” she deadpanned.
She had no idea which theories were true about the machine was about and all the potential links found, but... Part of her guiltily thought that she felt the chance to actually learn the truth. From Sans himself, at that! As much as she tried to dampen her enthusiasm for his sake, it was just up that this was incredibly cool.

“well... yeah. that’s the plan.”

He scratched the back of his spine in embarrassment and the rattling sound made her shiver again. She really should learn to hold her tongue, dang! She heard a deep inhale, then a sigh. Was he doing it for show, or...? She had trouble imagining how a could possibly breathe. The fandom had made headcanons about how the skeleton biology could, but whenever things like this were mentioned in the meeting, it was made clear that skeletons just... didn’t have these things at all.

When Sans continued his explanations, once, it sounded much more serious.

“basically, this machine was built so that, given enough power, it can control the time, that means it offers the possibility to go back in time whenever we program it, and it’s even can bring stuff and people along with it.” She said...
They were all propping up the wall to slightly hang his skull and look to the side. “But you’d think that after so many time travels, not really the part I’m focusing on.”

The contrary would have surprised her. If all he was a Reset, since he had already been through trouble to bring her here to begin with, he could have asked her to do it for him. But yeah, apparently sounded like the thing he wanted to avoid... After beyond obvious that these time shenanigans had ruined his life countless times.

“So what else can it do...?” If it wasn’t this special ability he was interested in, it had to be another.

“It’s the same ability as anyone who’s in control of the timeline, and it’s the same reason I brought you here.” She perked her head in surprise at that last sentence. “If you’re the ‘determined’ thing or being in the universe at a given time, it doesn’t only mean that you control the timeline. It also means that you everyone else from doing so.”

... Oh. So that was what her role was about. She was the shield. A Reset-proof living barrier.

“You mean that as long as I’m here, nobody can...”
Reset the game.”

“Exactly. Best thing is, you’re already doing right now. Just by standing here. Even if doing nothing, you’re still contributing. ‘s specifically need you to stay alive and in shape for this to work, so it’s to even benefit, right?” he smiled. “Theoretically it keepin’ you here forever should be enough the trick, but, eh, i’m sure you want to go so that’s why fixin’ the machine will be a permanent solution.”

He chuckled at that, but it sounded a little more than the previous times. She decided to just shrug and give him a patient smile.

“So... the plan was to get you here, fix the machine, send you back, and then go back for the last ever and get us all to the surface.” he concluded.

She nodded and hummed in both understanding and admiration. It was a simple plan, but she didn’t obvious flaw in its simplicity. Well, apart from where they would have to actually fix the machine since Sans said it had been fully functional at some would there they succeed again?

She believed in his plan. It might take a while t
She believed in his plan. It might take a while to reach the last step; but they would succeed, and it would bring everyone the Happy Ending they deserved.

“anyway, uh…” He now seemed back to his former and slightly dorky side, although he appeared a little… tense? Anxious? “I hope I can trust you to do anything stupid with your time powers.”

“Of course not!” She seemed almost offended, could even think of bringing up the subject, but she might have expressed her thoughts a little indignantly when she saw him stiffen and sink in his chair. She immediately cowered back on the sofa. “I-I mean, uhh, even if I wanted to Redeem something like that, I don’t even know how I’m supposed to work from here. So, either was positive you have nothing to worry about.”

“… heh. right.” He had appeared to squint his sockets in an indecipherable manner. He didn’t need to distrust her anymore, but… apparently, he found the need to add a small precision: “If even if you did that, that’d be pretty stupid erase this timeline, you’ll erase your ride home so… I wouldn’t do that if I were you.”

… Right. That too. She still had no idea how he had her inside the game, but she was certain that it i
her inside the game, but she was certain that it was a device that had not always been available to him. It had probably taken him a while to build it in the first place.

A heavy silence fell, during which she tried to think about everything that had been said so far. It appeared simple and logical, but... if only on the emotional level. There was already a lot more to take in. There were implications to the game being real, and...

“I... I had another question.” She hesitated, but once again Sans gestured her to continue with her calm nod. “How did you figure out all this?”

The dorky cheerfulness in his pupils seemed instantly restored. They wandered around for a few seconds, and then he heard him take another deep breath, but he answered nonetheless.

“Let’s... say that’s the tricky part.” he chirped tensely, as he seemed to be avoiding her gaze. “That’s some kind of work I started in a pre-timeline and... somehow, I don’t remember the details of how I came across those disk for the first time. Those plans just happened to survive the last time jumps. My computer he’s still ‘save’ virtual data, like blueprints or... that’s also what I use to save my memory, and... so that’s where I eventually found the plans...”
He decided against saying it out loud because he didn't want her to worry and go back to her paranoia mode earlier, but... He had to admit, that was suspiciously fishy that some data from a certain timeline had been saved, while some other data from the same timeline — say, his memory — had not been saved for some reason, by the very same device he was supposed to save both without making any difference.

Now that he could stop worrying about having his potentially erased due to time being rewound warning, and now that he could actually focus he and thought on basically anything else...

That was fishy. That was extremely fishy.

“they do look really familiar, and that old one only responds to my magic signature, so i’m the only one who could’ve possibly done calculations and the spectrum measures at any point anyway. but as for the details of how the idea to make THAT kind of measures first place... sorry, can’t help ya.” He gave half-reassured look and added: “don’t worry there, i redid them all just in case, during this time and i got the same results. i mean... you’d... i wouldn’t accept that the anomaly comes to videos somehow, i just got some REAL type of...
For the first time, Dawn actually started to doubt that felt like he was hiding something from her, and ‘thing’ he was hiding from her was not so hard to. What he had just said was not making much sense didn’t know how this ‘saving’ thing worked at all, the contradiction she saw was simply due to misunderstanding to the one during which Sans she had lied to him, but...

He knew how the full mechanisms worked, and finding this suspicious too. Had it been... dangerous her here without having solved this contradiction.

Some people are just too smart for their own good. She seemed on the verge of asking him for further and explanations, but an unexpected event stopped her before she even had the time to open her mouth.

The neon lights on the ceiling started flickering, a few seconds, they remained lit. They both stared at the ceiling in surprise for moment, but the monster was the first to properly. Then again, although a relieved wide grin appeared face, he didn’t turn his gaze away from the lights.

“finally. they really got me worried there.”

The human directed a pair of confused eyes towards and they instantly froze in place.
and they instantly froze in place.
This was the first time she actually could see in all his real details, under a full light. She... wasn't of what she had been expecting, really. He didn't nearly as terrifying as he did before when they were stuck in the dark; nonetheless, this sight was... profoundly

Somehow, although she thought she should have prepared for this by now, seeing a skeleton moving on its own was still quite a shock; and now that she was all of his subtle movements with an enhanced the contrast between the life that was so obvious in him and the so obviously non-organic bones... The strangest part was the fact that she simply couldn't tell whether these bones were solid or not; it was all their texture changed constantly depending on whether she wanted them to move or not... Was that how magic worked? Purely through the monster's intent? The fact that the game said their bodies were attuned to souls, maybe that was literally it.

Still, she just... couldn't wrap her mind around the fact his skull looked like hard, solid bone, and yet he could its shape just however he wanted it, somehow. it looked like his chest was rising and falling—actually breathing? How?! He didn't have lungs,

"you okay there, bud?"
She jerked awake from her trance and felt her cheeks start to slowly redden in embarrassment. Of course, he had caught her staring.

“S-sorry. I was just...” Okay she really didn’t want to bring that sort of uncomfortable topic. She didn’t know what she should instead change the subject and perhaps look towards the ceiling. “What just happened?”

“i guess alphys finally managed to reboot the machine. I, uh... i think i maaaaay have overloaded it... badly when i used my machine to bring you here. It got me worried for a while that, uh... the others might’ve been too serious and it could’ve. Let’s just say we’re lucky that didn’t happen...” Yikes. So it wasn’t just a local blackout. He hadn’t known about the nationwide power outage just by kidnapping her.

Sans stood up from his chair, then walked towards her. After turning off the now useless desk lamp, he was arranging a few papers into piles, went to check his computer had taken the shutdown, sighed in some point—it looked like nothing too bad had happened to its system or files, fortunately. When she reminded him that he had said this was the same device responsible for keeping his data and memory safe throughout the whole felt all the energy drained from his face.
She felt all the more relieved for him. She hesitated at first, but when curiosity won over nervousness, she eventually stood up herself and walked towards the desk, observing from afar.

“Can I help with something?” He blinked in surprise, then turned his skull towards her with two perplexed pellets.

“oh, you’re...” He stopped himself before he could say the legendary ‘still here?’ and completely lost like the dorky scientist cliché, as he suddenly felt conscious and stupid. Of course, where else could she have gone anyway? So instead, he added, “don’t worry, i got this. don’t think you could do much anyway. you wouldn’t happen to have a degree in magic entanglement physics, would you?”

“No, not really...” She knew he had meant it as a compliment, but yet she looked down in shame and disappointment.

“i mean, magic isn’t even supposed to be a thing where you come from. right?” She wanted him to know how he could even know that to begin with. She wasn’t looking at her, so he completely ignored her startled look. “you know, it’s... funny. taking all this a lot better than i expected, not that i’m gonna complain ‘bout that.”
“I’m... pretty much just doing my best not to burn out right now.” she laughed meekly with a slight smirk. “But seriously, if there’s something I can do, don’t hesitate to tell me. I know I can’t exactly keep up with the calculations like you and I’d understand if you want to see me anywhere near your machine, but you can keep chattin’ if you want. doesn’t bother me.” he chuckled sincerely. He couldn’t help but add in a melancholic yet hopeful mutter—nice to finally have a real chat, for a change.

Oh crap. He had sounded almost happy when saying that, but it only made the realization all the more heart-wrenching when it struck.

Ever since the beginning, he had been stuck in real-time loops during which he was the only one remembering that anything was wrong, and wouldn’t he had forced himself to keep the act no matter what. He must have been so lonely and hopeless...

No wonder having someone completely new and someone who could also empathize with his situation, ever so slightly, had such surprising effect on him. Finally starting to better understand why he had been so chatty and friendly all of a sudden.

At first, she had assumed that he was just keeping up the attitude he had created over time during his first in the
attitude he would mention during his right in the run: that he would force himself to befriend the in order to get on its good side. This would have but almost... *expected*, coming from him. But now... Just then, with this one sentence, seemed to regain his trust as soon as he had been that she had been honest all along; and from that onwards, he had opened up so easily to her... Maybe he just *genuinely* needed someone he could nice chat with? He wasn’t answering *all* the questions had, but he didn’t seem to mind her being in supposed to be the most secret place he owned: truly contained the machine he used to save himself; this was also the place that made him the *most* valued. This really had to mean that he trusted her; and to an extent she would have never thought possible. Maybe he was just so tired... he didn’t even care secrets anymore. He *was* thinking that this was going the end. Just by looking at him, and knowing that remember the Resets— he had definitely seen that at some point. He had explicitly stated that this ultimate goal. Reach the Surface, settle a new finally move on along with everyone. So... Maybe wanted to get most of his burdens over with before. He would have enough physical weight to mover
Surface anyway; the psychological ones that needed were better left behind in the Undergroun
She had stayed by his side for the first few minutes, but soon enough, watching him in silence started to get especially since she could hardly understand what he was writing down. Part of her was surprised when she noticed that she couldn’t see any trace of Wingdings anywhere that his handwriting didn’t look like Comic Sans at least, then again, his blueprints and scribbles didn’t need to be written in an illegible font to be nearly indecipherable.

... Also, after bending like this for too long, her neck eventually get a crick.
So she silently left him at his work, contemplating the room for a bit. Before she knew it, she was several feet away from the purplish curtain that was supposed to cover what was implied by the game to be an old machine of some kind. So, this was the infamous he had mentioned earlier? And his plan involved
She still wanted to avoid getting too close to it, what Sans had said, she deeply felt like she was and she was certain that this machine in particular. She was certain he wouldn’t have actually wanted anywhere near it, under more normal circumstances, if he didn’t think that she knew about his secrets. The game’s canon and the theories she had read
The game's canon and the theories she had read, that this machine held some deep connection—maybe it had some sentimental value, or it represented something potentially depressing in his past...

Maybe it was completely irrelevant. Or maybe it was connected with the elusive Dr. W. D. Gaster and his tragic death...

She was in the most perfect place if she wanted to ask her questions, and the best part of it was that apparently he seemed to be willing to answer practically all of them, as long as she bothered to openly ask them.

But... It wasn’t fair. As much as curiosity ate her up inside, she just couldn’t bring herself to ask too many. Maybe the reason he was answering her questions was nothing to do with him actually wanting to talk to her, the real reason could be anything. Maybe her being close and the newest Anomaly made him wary or intimated, or he and he thought that satisfying her curiosity was the best way to stay on her good side and keep her from potentially abusing her time-related powers for personal reasons. Maybe he had become so nihilistic, he thought that it was pointless to try to keep anything from her already knew way more than she should and as well piece everything together if she became so maybe answering everything right off the bat would prevent her from being nosy and potentially start with his things... She did not bother trying to f
with his things... She did not bother trying to reason he could have thought about, and there was a simple *reason* for this:

These were all *terrible* reasons to have him talk about his problems.

"you can remove the blanket if you want, you know. I think it just might make it easier to look at, though." She shrieked in surprise, jumping about three feet to the side. *Somehow,* Sans had appeared right next to her, without warning, literally coming out of nowhere. He had taken that opportunity to give her a giant meme.

*did he just meme her?*

As soon as he saw her terrified expression and heard her scream though, his grin literally melted away. As much as he tried to dispel his permanent grin could fade, at least; it was a very subtle shift, just noticeable enough to show that he had stopped smiling.

Dawn mimed some coughing before apologizing overreacting, muttering she just wasn’t used to teleporting around her, but it had sounded like dismissing the actual reason behind her fright, so...

He sent her a confused look, but soon his pupils darted in the opposite direction, running away from her.
"... did I really spook you that badly?"

He had sounded so... small. The sheepish and smile on his face, and the way he had shifted his from her, made her realize that he was actually himself for her reaction. Did he think that he had far? But this was just a prank! And it was her fault so easily startled by such obvious and cheap trick. She didn’t remember him pulling that specific of game, but given all the other jokes he did, everyone and had imagined him doing it at some point.

The fanon had definitely made a lot of comics where he would appear out of nowhere in order people and make it sound like he had been watching all along. She thought most of the situations where joke would happen were cases where someone wronged Papyrus in some hilarious and stupid accidently swearing in his presence or telling truth about his spaghetti. This was never a prank be taken seriously, and this was certainly not a was supposed to feel bad for.

“O-oh, uh,” She was stuttering. She hated why couldn’t stop her stuttering. “I just t-tend affected even b-by the cheapest jump-scares. when they’re obvious, they always get me everyone else laughs ‘cause it makes me look stu...
“i, uh... i meant earlier.”

*What do you mean earli— oh.*

Right... That moment when gravity had gave in and been given the front row seats to a wonderful play. Sans’s infamous bad time, had he been actually with his threats. Okay, *maybe* she still had trouble with these horrifying images from her memory even they had both agreed not to talk about that ever again and to deny it had ever occurred.

“you... really seemed to take it a lot harder thought you would.” he eventually muttered. it took you off guard ‘cause you really had no what i was doin that for, but even then...”

... Of course he had noticed. Even before she had herself, at that.

His pupils slightly flashed to a cyan color for a split second before they returned to their usual white and the effect only lasted second before they returned to their usual white and turned his skull away from her, but a shiver crawled its way up her spine against her volition.

“I... W-well okay it’s not j-just that. But it’s n-no fault...i’ve just always had a troubled...with
fault. I’ve just always... had t-trouble with... related to...” She gulped. She really didn’t want to have that discussion right now. “It’s... L-lots of pretty embarrassing and it’s r-really not imp-

“aw, c’mon.” he retorted jokingly. “It’s not liketell anyone you know ‘bout it.” He winked nudged her jokingly, but she stiffened slightly unconsciously when his elbow invaded her personal space. His smile dropped as soon as he noticed she swiftly retracted his arm in response.

“Let’s... j-just say there’s a reason why I really watch horror movies.” She was desperately trying to avoid his look but somehow her eyes couldn’t but go back to staring at him every time he managed to pull them away from him, as if she anxiously dreading his reaction.

Her answer hadn’t seemed to give him as many she had imagined. He pondered her sentence for then he appeared to reach a conclusion, whether or erroneous. And then he just had to ask that ques-

“you mean it has to do with ‘evil scary monstersome stuff like that?’” Funnily, he didn’t offended by the idea. Almost amused, actually just confused. It was hard to read his express-

“i uh... don’t actually know what humans put i
fun, don’t actually know what humans put in horror shows. ‘specially ones from another place where magic doesn’t exist. are ‘evil more stories a thing?’

“Uh, I-I guess so, but... I mean...” Okay that’s becoming way too embarrassing and she felt like she really would not find any way to change the topic now. Just peachy. She was starting to feel her face redden and get warmer by the second and she really just wanted to wrap this up by now.

“i wonder what stupid stuff you could’ve thought about.” he stated out loud. And he was glaring at her. Okay now he was just doing this to mess with her. She knew it, and dang it this was making him ridiculous and he loved it. “if magic doesn’t exist then what sort of stuff could give you ideas for horror stories? unless you don’t need magic. think about the possibility? guess that’d explain how you still get what’s going on around here if you don’t know much about the concepts of this reality.”

“No, look, you just don’t...” She was face-palming with both hands as an attempt to hide her face in shame, now almost as red as her shirt. He nudged her again, this time more gently.
shirt. He hugged her again, this time more gently than before, once more encouraging her to talk because if he had been sharing some of his own secrets with her it was only right for her to return the favor. Oh God damn it what a troll.

Oh for Pete’s sake what the hell she’d just say it over with already.

“I can’t stand stuff related to DEATH.” Her arm came up to her face in exasperation. “Okay? Corpses, blood, all that stuff, it’s always creeped me out and I even saw a therapist three years ago in order to try and tone it down because that’s a completely normal thing to be scared of. Happy now?”

He just... blinked. The revelation appeared to take him a few seconds before it sank in... Ooh, right. Now that he was thinking back of his time on the Surface, that totally made sense. That behavior did ring a bell.

“i... already was a skeleton even back when you watchin’ the game, right? i mean ok you didn’t do it, but you still knew a lot of stuff so you must have...”


Sans watched the human scowl in embarrassment...
Sans watched the human scowl in embarrassment, bury her head in her arms while spinning away overdramatically, and at first he couldn’t help but her childish demeanor. But then, as he managed control over his breathing, he started to realize. Maybe she just... wasn’t actually done with the crisis problem, now that he was taking a moment about it. Hadn’t she mentioned that she was still her best not to freak out”, just a few minutes earlier that was what she had said...

“Look.” She buried her head back in her hands, sighed. “I... I’m sure I’m just a bit on edge because everything that happened, and now I’m overreacting and you must be thinking I’m acting stupid or specism a thing? I-I’m n-not... but... Ugh. You can’t I-it’s really not so bad. You looked a lot scarier dark is all. A-and I’m sure the ‘blue-light-from-your-face’ trick didn’t help when I was in the air. Her eye twitched awkwardly. “But. That was... just—g-gimme some time. It’ll get better. So... we just drop that conversation now? Please?”

He tilted his skull towards her, studying her intently. She pursed her lips and felt her face blush once more as she forcibly looked away and tried to take deep breaths... That made him chuckle bluntly once more, she an embarrassed yet betrayed look, and he apolo.
an embarrassed yet betrayed look, and he apologized, laughing twice as hard as he shook his skull.

“heh... ok, if you insist. but... joke aside? you don’t need to beat yourself over it that much, been on the surface before, so i’ve seen humans react to us in general. and these people were already used to magic. to some extent. She sent him a shy look. His smile grew a bit broader, and he shrugged jokingly. “before we met... i can’t even say i hadn’t seen it coming. even if you knew already, i guess some things just can’t be held back.” She sighed guiltily. “I guess humankind isn’t exactly known for its tolerance, huh? Not that I’m putting myself up as a good example right now...” she muttered in shame.

“naaaaaah. honestly, you’re not doing too bad. specially if it’s some phobia material you’re talkin’ about. hard to believe you have one of those.”

“Well I did get over my fear of Halloween decorations two years ago.” she smirked. Then when she saw the confused expression she realized that he probably didn’t know what ‘Halloween’ was. “Uuh... i meant to say, it’s obvious that you’re alive and that’s what counts. As long as I don’t see anything die or already dead, things should be...
This time, his chuckling had sounded a lot darker, forced. Her smile dropped.

... She suddenly remembered what she had purportedly theorized regarding the outcome of the timeline they were currently in. Then again, she had reached that conclusion through assuming that Sans could not remember the resets, so maybe...

“good thing you’re late to the show, then.”

There was a long and tense pause.

“What... happened exactly?” She gulped in anticipation.

“Which timeline is this? A-am I saying it right.

“i killed Frisk.” His pupils darkened and darted, his skull tilting down in shame. His expression seemed to be composed of sadness, concern, She was not really sure how she should interpret.

“... t’was around a month ago.”

There was only one way it could have been possible to do that. A strong silence filled the room. Her heart sank and she bit her bottom lip, but she didn’t give any noticeable reaction to his speech. A few seconds later, her head tilted in sudden realization:

“But... wait. I-if Frisk died, then what happened to their soul? I m-mean, that makes your rem
seventh human soul, right...? And, you killed before they killed Asgore, so... Did he break Barrier or something?"

"no. the kid’s soul disintegrated a few seconds after their death, as usual."

She gave him a blank look, but then remembered, ‘Game overs’ worked and how the little red hair indeed shatter each time the player’s HP reached 0. That was... strange, and sad for them, but... She was what to think of such situation, she realized. Was Frisk actually ‘alive’ the same way Sans and the were? They never were in control of anything of game, not even of their own body as it seemed, hard to tell. In fact, seeing how they were the permanently controlled either by the player or she hoped that they didn’t have that sort of sent other monsters did.

Even if they appeared to live in a virtual world and could only be ‘artificial intelligences’ of some kind had proven to her that their emotions and feelings very real. Being forced to be sentient yet not have possibility to do anything at all... Well, she had read fanfics about this kind of situation already, and the quality of these fanfics, the tragedy they could easily be smoothed and damaged also.
could easily be empathized and lamented about.

When she thought over the situation under a purer perspective, however, she rationalized that this, while not impossible, would feel unnecessary.

Although she was not herself a specialist when it came to programming and data manipulation, one thing she was certain about was that if something was unnecessary in the program, that feature was either dummied out, or removed. If Frisk were always meant to be the avatar, she thought it to be unlikely for Toby specifically think of a personality and personal life even if it was to be dummied out afterwards.

So... Part of her felt reassured when she managed to convince herself that, unlike the monsters, it was likely that Frisk was an actual robot, or some kind of shell ready to be taken over by the players. This also meant that whenever the monsters were killing her... Well, unlike when the players would kill monsters, the players would kill monsters that they truly weren’t actually hurting anyone they weren’t aware of it.

Then again, if she tried to refine this perspective by the situation the other way around... If Frisk also was just a decoy created by the video game as some MacGuffin, it would also explain why their soul could be taken by anyone. Chances were, this little...
wasn’t even a real SOUL to begin with.

“well... i guess it’s for the best anyway. if we get to the surface right now, it’d be to wage against humans. and i think we both know how that would’ve ended.”

She bit her lip, looked away and nodded tensely. again. As much as she could easily convince herself Frisk’s SOUL probably meant nothing... It didn’t change their arrival in this world had on the reality that already lived inside. How many monsters were. The game only showed a few dozens of them at a few more were mentioned, and who knows there were more, even if the game never gave them the opportunity to meet them. And they were all... They were all suffering the same way Sans had. They couldn’t remember the Resets, but still, the thinking of Papyrus, Undyne, Alphys, Toriel, Mettaton... And there were so many others hardly dared mention by name, as she felt that had started to sting.

They all suffered so much from the actions of the realization that thinking about the fate of ‘characters’ was just the tip of the iceberg and every single inhabitant of the Underground was
single individual with independent memories and
of their own...

She felt like gulping, or saying something, anything
throat was completely dry.

“in any case... i actually had a question for
She tilted her head in surprise; he was avoiding
look at first, but after he took a short breath, his
shining pupils dashed in her direction. “it’s
from the point when the game took over, we
had any break at all. time’d usually jump back
the next few minutes if frisk died, or with
next twenty-four hours if they reach the be
or... well, sometimes if they get killed repeat,
they also take longer to come back.”

“ Might be when the player rage-quits...” she
muttered under her breath; seeing her low to
absorbed look, Sans realized that she probably
not meant to actually say it out loud.

“... yeah. maybe. anyway...” He sighed, enlarging
pause to better gain her full attention: “+=
literally the first time there hasn’t been
jump in over a month. i was just curious ab
y’know. so... by any chance, would you know
something that could explain it? did an
happen with that game during the past month.

The human lowered her look and squinted her eyes a few seconds to think back as seriously and thoroughly as she could. After a few seconds, her mouth opened wide.

“Hm... I think I could think of something, actually.” He widened his eye-sockets immediately, silently urging her to continue: “I mean, it didn’t happen exactly one month ago, but... Some time around the beginning of March, there was an update on the game. Version one-point-zero-zero-zero-whatever... "an 'update'?" he repeated incredulously, then hurriedly: “what kind of update?”

“S-sorry, I really don’t know that much about it. But now that you mention it, I remember that a few of the dataminers were disappointed because they hadn’t noticed anything different. At least nothing ‘interesting.’ The other times we had new lines of dialogue or new plot features. Not this time.”

But then again... What if there had been something different during that update...? It just had to be something, that none of them had noticed before. If a character had been introduced, but that this change involved so that they didn’t even know existed in the first place?
There was no questioning why nobody would not.

“You think it could’ve done something to stop the game from acting here already? Do you think they found out about you being real and actually found a way to solve the problem?” Suddenly, Beaming and hopeful.

... Hmm. That’s an... interesting coincidence.

Sans seemed unsure. “I... wouldn’t bet on it, but if that’s the case... t’was about time the game was out, anyway?”

“Well... I heard there was a free demo available the way back in 2013, but it was far from being a finished game, so, that one probably doesn’t..."

She suddenly froze in place, as she started to consider that option. The only area that could be explored in the demo was that of the Ruins, but then again... As she knew, the demo’s plot, dialogue options and look practically identical to the final product, when it was the part that was effectively available. So if this world was somehow real from the start...

“Wait, no... What if it was already taking effect back then, too?” Suddenly addressing him, she stared at him with curious yet determined...
“Would you remember making a speech about "Papyrus where you’d be in a dark place and lying on a deckchair while drinking soda?"

Sans gave her a weird look, surprised she would ask such random question, and all the more dumbfounded that she would ask it with a straight face, no less. Just as quickly, her eyes lost that spark of certainty and looked down in confusion.

“... Oh wait, never mind, I think that one came from the Kickstarter instead. So... Y-yeah, let’s just stick with the demo stuff.” She gave her a sheepish grin that quickly faded. “The finished game came out in September 2015. Which means that by now it’s been almost...” She quickly stared at the ceiling as she did the math. “… a bit more than eight months, I guess.”

“eight months…”

He repeated those two words in a heavy tone, pondering about their meaning and their deepest implication. She realized that he was counting it as the amount of time he had been actually stuck in the time loops, dropped and she felt as if something new within her had just missed a heartbeat. Except that it didn’t feel like her biological heart.

In the end, he just sighed again, running a bony
his forehead and taking deep breaths.

"well... thanks for tellin me, anyway. i don't even know what to do with that info, but... i suppose that's all we're gonna get, huh."

Dawn thought back of the implications of the huge hole she had made. What if the update truly had this consequence? This would mean that someone in Toby Fox's world, whether Toby Fox himself or someone else, had found out that the world they had created was real, alive, and...

Well, the good news was, chances were that they manage to make it so that even if people from our world kept playing Undertale, these players' games would be messed with this world. But she also realized that the game couldn't Reset anymore... Then, without any machine or anyone else able to use that power, that everyone was now completely stuck in one of the worst timelines of all, forever. Did Toby Fox know this timeline he had trapped everyone in, or...?

She realized that when she had brought up this possibility, Sans had felt very uneasy about considering the possibility. Because if this truly was what had happened, then it only mean one thing: there was no more purpose for the 'shield' against the Resets anymore. But although he didn't think it was possible, there was a little hope...
about this possibility made her feel a little sad. She still felt differently about the situation as a whole.

There was a chance that bringing her here was completely pointless when it came to her alleged ability to use Resets... But it did not mean that she could not use her power literally anything else.

Whether the game still had an effect on this world or not, a Reset still had to be made at some point in order to affect everyone, and that very specific Reset would only be possible through one specific way. She had the power to make that very special Reset; but this wasn’t what Sans was looking for, and she respected that decision.

So instead, she would help him through any other Reset she had; she assumed that this would take them to the end. But she didn’t mind so much. As long as they were doing this for a purpose, this was what mattered.

“Anyway.” Sans sighed again after some more contemplation. “Guess that means I should go back to work.” He unexpectedly bent his spine backward and proceeded to pop every single vertebra in his back, one after the others while exaggeratedly grunting like an old guy. The human couldn’t help but look wide-eyed at how was that even possible. He glanced at her expression, rolled his eyes overdramatically.
and snorted. “Fine, you got me, I was messin’ ya on purpose this time.” That troll.

She tried to give him an annoyed glare, but quickly realized she was incapable of actually doing it, as she had been giggling uncontrollably at his nonsensical shenanigans.

Before she knew it, her burning forehead was within her hands as she couldn’t stop her exhausted idiotic laughter. She was just... done. She was done.

Well, this wasn’t too bad a situation. But that was much all at once and now she needed one hell of a break.

The skeleton observed her for a few seconds, joining her laugh at first, but soon he just shook lightly with a goofy smile.

When the human finally managed to take a deep breath and stop her hilarity, he was already back to sitting at the desk, but he still gave her a patient look as she heard her silence. Of course he knew what was going on.

“that being said... in the meantime, well, you can stay here, but I’d understand if you need some time to, uh. let everything sink in or what...” She made a nervous smile and her eyes darted to other parts of the room. He chuckled and pointed his skull towards the end of the room: “door’s unlocked, by the way...”
Dawn hesitated a bit, but she soon came back to him in the eye and send him a genuine
“I... Thanks. I think I’ll take a little stroll, and I think... I need some fresh air after all this.”

As fresh as the air could get in the Underground, they were in Snowdin, so maybe the cold
help her keep a cool head. She walked towards the room and only stopped when her hand went
the knob. Just before leaving, she added:

“I won’t be too far, don’t worry.”

The monster didn’t really seem to care about that as he was already too deep into his thoughts and
sent her an absent-minded wave before he said something that sounded like “yeah whatev, t’s y’could go anywhere.”, probably without he really...
... Right. That too. It was very likely that his house was the only place where she would be welcomed at all,

She had expected to directly meet up with fresh snow and pine trees as soon as she would open
upstairs, but surprisingly, after climbing the stairs and opening a second one, she instead ended up inside
To be more specific, after a few more steps forward she realized that she was now standing in the middle
living room of Sans’s and Papyrus’s house. Huh.
Under other circumstances, she would have questioned why there was such an obvious incongruity with the game... But instead of this, as soon as she gave more attention to her new surroundings... On something foreign yet familiar in her chest sank. The couch was missing obviously, since Sans had been in the basement for some reason; but even if she overlooked this element... She actually had a hard time recognizing the place. It looked so different than the one from the game, not because any notable detail would truly be out of place, but the atmosphere of the ensemble was enough to give her a rush of sadness and guilt.

Was this... what the house looked like when there was nobody to take care of it anymore...?

Sans had said that the Genocide had occurred a month earlier. This house... Papyrus had been gone for the entire month. As had everyone else. Sans had definitely not spared any time for maintenance of life and warmth in this place; not only because of his alleged laziness, but most probably, as she thought, because he had been way too busy with his work to bother with otherworldly shenanigans to focus on something as trivial as housework.

Without Papyrus... This house truly had lost its life...
This... was just too much to watch. She gulped, then set off towards the front door and ran outside, the snow crunching under her footsteps. She stopped only a few feet from the house, standing in place and gawking at The town. Snowdin Town. This town was real. The Underground was real. And it was empty.

If she had been keeping any doubts over whether the entire situation was real or not, this was what would make them vanish for good. On her left side stretched the unending snowed path filled with fog and pine trees, and on her right laid an oh-so-familiar town. Or at least, the empty and dark buildings of a town.

Was the Underground always supposed to be like this? If they had been on the surface, she would have known that the sun had set hours earlier and that no light was visible due to unfavorable weather conditions; she looked at what was supposed to be the sky and saw pure blackness. Her eyes weren’t nearly strong enough to distinguish whether there was anything on the ceiling or if it was merely composed of solid blackness seeing how dark the surroundings were... She realized that the monsters didn’t have to deal with this situation constantly: the only visible light around was coming from the house right behind her. As for the rest... Everyone was dead. This really had become a ghost town.
was dead. This really had become a ghost town.

After some time, surprisingly, this view stopped her so deeply. At first, she feared that she was deceiving herself from this cruel reality, that maybe as some coping mechanism she had tried to protect herself caring about the horrors of this world anymore; she was starting to respond to this situation in apathetic manner; but soon, she understood what rising feeling was.

It was probably born out of some frustration or response to the unfairness of this situation, but her features on her face hardened, only the sudden realization almost managed to break this expression, which thought made her crack a small and sad ironic smile.

She was filled with determination.

She stopped caring about this horrendous situation because deep inside this familiar yet strange sorrow her chest, she knew. She knew this wasn’t the end. She believed in Sans’s plan. She would help him at all costs. She knew they would succeed. They would do it, together. They would save everyone.

Now that she had been reminded of it... She felt small guilty curiosity. Well, she wasn’t sure if curiosity made her feel guilty, because as long as she wouldn’t use it as an excuse to make selfish and egocentric.
wouldn’t use it as an excuse to make selfish and unfair decisions, it was fine; but... She was inside the gate, she was supposed to be the one in charge, right?

She really wanted to know what the consequences of that fact were. What were her SOUL’s stats? Would she have some SAVE Points around the Underground? How did ‘SAVING’ work? She had made a point ahead of time that even if given the opportunity to do so, she wouldn’t try to figure out how ‘Resetting’ worked, but ‘SAVING’ wouldn’t hurt anybody, right? If it only ensured that their progress would be, well... this was a good thing!

She quickly squinted her eyes as she tried to look in the distance towards the other end of the town; there was supposed to be a SAVE Point over there in the gap between the Snowed Inn and the Shop... but she couldn’t find anything.

The air really was cold; she could see her own breath even though this wouldn’t normally deter her. She was used to seeing this in her home town every year during the winter season, this time was different. It was the beginning of May in her own world: her outfit was definitely not fit for an expedition in the area of the Underground, that was for sure. She would have thought of taking the ‘Undersnow
and exploring more thoroughly the other side of the town in order to check whether the SAVE Point was the way out, but the cold was already starting to get to her, and how dark the place seemed to be... She certainly did not want to find herself alone at the darkest hour of the day. Even if Points looked like small stars in the game, chances they weren’t truly shining any true light, so she’d be able to see them in such darkness anyway. And again... what need would they have for a SAVE at the end? It wasn’t like they would go back to anything if Sans was right about his plan, soon, nobody ever be able to...

She heard some distant footsteps in her back. They came from inside the house, as she had stupidly left it open. She turned towards Sans and sent him a small smile: 

“hey, uh... ‘dawn’, right?” He stopped patiently at the entrance of his house, his shadow spread over the snow below their feet. “just wanted to know if it’s almost time for dinner, you hungry?”

Dinner already, huh...? Somehow, it felt like her clock claimed that it was too early for that. So she then shook her head while pursing her lips in a dou

“... Not really. How about you?”
“just a bit.” He shrugged too. Then his eyes went to the side, reluctantly. “... still have to go, the
“Where are you going?” she asked immediately, eyes reflecting some curiosity among her contors.
“hotland. since, uh, y’know, the survivors she made in the lab and stuff.” His left hand got out of his hoodie’s pocket and went to scratch the back of his skull awkwardly. “sorry i’m not offering you to come along, but... i guess you understand i can’t really bring you around.”

... Right. Near-Genocide ending.
Her brain quickly formed a mental image of how in the True Laboratory would freak out after Sassy had brought a human through a shortcut only after an even younger human had been responsible for killing everyone they knew... Yeah. Bad idea.

“i’ll try to be quick, but just in case something happens... worst case scenario, i should be back in an hour and a half. can you wait till then?”
He nodded confidently, and his smile seemed to become a little more genuine as his look somehow softened. “okay then. see ya. in the meantime, i dunno, do whatever you want.”

“Yeah... To be honest? I thought of something
Yeah... To be honest? I thought of something
Sans raised a nonexistent eyebrow in surprise inciting her to explain:

“I know that everything here’s going to be once we’re done fixing your machine and all won’t matter in the end and everything, She took a deep breath. “We’re still going to be here for a while, before you launch the Reset. P
“uh...” He turned his skull away, deep in thought also a bit embarrassed. “i guess so...? it’ll prob take a few weeks at best, true...”

“Right. So... I just thought. We’re going to be here for a while. And since I’m going to stay here, I like to be useful. So, I don’t know if you’ll let me fix the machine, but in the meantime...? There’s something else in this house that needs some too. Or some cleaning or whatever.” She sent unsure look. This still wasn’t technically hers so if only for courtesy, she still had to ask approval first: “You wouldn’t mind, would you
He seemed to give so little care to the matter, that she asked him that question actually surprised hi
“well... sure? knock yourself out?” He scratched his chin in a pondered pose. “in that case...
skull again, completely confused. “Just, uh. leave the basement out of this.”

“Of course. Then again,” she jokingly raised her slyly and theatrically rubbed her chin with a pensive look and a smug grin, “I could always rearrange your papers in alphabetical order.”

Sans’s expression was now only that of two empty eye-holes and a strained horrified “PLEASE DON’T.”

His face was genuinely horrifying, but she couldn’t tell if it was a threatened expression instead of a threatening one; thus, although she had instantly looked away, she had immediately burst into laughs. “Oh, come on! Anyone could’ve seen a mile away that I was kidding.”

“i know. but even thinking about something sadistic. this is evil. only an evil mastermind do something so twisted.”

“Yes.” She attempted her best impression of a villainous smirk. “I’m the evilest human you’ll see. Your basement will be so perfectly clean, polished, your feeble eyes won’t even be able to look at it. You’ll never be able to approach your mirror because its reflection will be so bright, it’ll blind
so now that you’re in a world where your soul has an actual physicality… you should be strong enough to steal power from the game itself.

“well, i knew it. no soap, evil human. if you’re going down this dirty path, i’m afraid i’ll have to polish you too.” And there they were, laughing idiots and taking over the conversation when other had left it off, only to make it even nonsensical. When Sans managed to regain over his hilarity, he perked a quick glance watch on his left wrist: “… heh… welp. guess i should go, or they’re gonna start to worry.”

Dawn nodded encouragingly. He sent her a friendly in return, to which she responded with a thumbs

And then he disappeared. She hadn’t seen him anything (no, not even a snap of fingers), but merely vanished in an instant, just like that.

... Welp. Here was a shortcut, then.
Anyway. She had about an hour and a half before right? She might as well get started.
She gasped in silence, but then kept this air inside of her lungs as she found herself unable to release it. Everything had seemed to fall into place, to such extent and at such velocity, she started to feel nauseated.

After a few seconds though, she slowly calmed down… and suddenly she repressed a burst of cynical laughter. Of course not, there simply was no way. She would never be determined enough. Not her. He would never make her buy that one. Hilarious. What made him think that?

He seemed to be completely certain of what he was saying, so she was willing to believe him; but the mere idea of thinking of herself as ‘determined’ felt… strange. She could stand her ground when necessary, but… that was pretty much it. She was nowhere as determined as what the game seemed to define the word as.

“I… wow.”

She took a few seconds to blink repeatedly and try to put her thoughts back in order. She was particularly curious to learn how he could have learned about the power of a ‘player’s’ soul without having ever seen one before.

Alphys had needed to see human souls directly in order to learn just about the existence of determination, so… How did he do it without even having any player anywhere near? As far as she knew, he definitely hadn’t kidnapped anyone else before her in order to dissect their soul. Just the thought of such thing made her feel sick. Good thing she really couldn’t figure him doing anything like this.

“So… I can Reset. Okay.” She still needed to hear herself say it in order to fully believe it, although she kept lowering her head and blinking at the void. “But… What’s the next step? Why did you, uh… ‘give’ me that power to begin with?”

She heard him chuckle again: apparently, it pleased him to have her ask so many questions. He turned his skull and used it to point towards the end of the room, but before he could say anything, he seemed to realize that since the basement was still stuck in the dark, they could not see what he was trying to point.

“… hm. does the, ah, ‘game’, tell you anything about an old machine that’s supposed to be in this room?”

“Oh! You mean you’re going to fix it?” she deduced.
She had no idea which theories were true about what this machine was about and all the potential links they had found, but… Part of her guiltily thought that she finally had the chance to actually learn the truth.

From Sans himself, at that! As much as she tried to tone down her enthusiasm for his sake, it was just undeniable that this was incredibly cool.

“well… yeah. that’s the plan.”

He scratched the back of his spine in embarrassment again and the rattling sound made her shiver again. Whoops. She really should learn to hold her tongue, dang it…

She heard a deep inhale, then a sigh. Was he doing it just for show, or…? She had trouble imagining how a skeleton could possibly breathe. The fandom had made a lot of headcanons about how the skeleton biology could work, but whenever things like this were mentioned in the game, it was made clear that skeletons just… didn’t have any of these things at all.

When Sans continued his explanations, once again he sounded much more serious.

“basically, this machine was built so that, if it’s given enough power, it can control the timeline. that means it offers the possibility to go back in time whenever we program it, and it’s even able to bring stuff and people along with it.” She saw him slightly hang his skull and look to the side. “but, eh, you’d think that after so many time travels, that’s not really the part i’m focusing on.”

The contrary would have surprised her. If all he wanted was a Reset, since he had already been through all the trouble to bring her here to begin with, he could have just asked her to do it for him. But yeah, apparently that sounded like the thing he wanted to avoid… After all, it was beyond obvious that these time shenanigans had already ruined his life countless times.

“So what else can it do…?” If it wasn’t this specific ability he was interested in, it had to be another.

“it’s the same ability as anyone who’s in charge of the timeline. and it’s the same reason why i brought you here.” She perked her head up in surprise at that last sentence. “if you’re the ‘most determined’ thing or being in the universe at a given time, it doesn’t only mean that you can control the timeline. it also means that you stop everyone else from doing so.”

… Oh. So that was what her role was about.

She was the shield. A Reset-proof living barrier.
“You mean that as long as I’m here, nobody can Reset the game.”

“exactly. best thing is, you’re already doing it right now. just by standing here. even if you’re doing nothing, you’re still contributing. ‘sides, i specifically need you to stay alive and in good shape for this to work, so it’s to everyone’s benefit, right?” he smiled. “theoretically i guess keepin’ you here forever should be enough to do the trick, but, eh, i’m sure you want to go home. so that’s why fixin’ the machine will be a more permanent solution.”

He chuckled at that, but it sounded a little more awkward than the previous times. She decided to just shrug jokingly and give him a patient smile.

“so… the plan was to get you here, fix the machine, send you back, and then go back for the last time ever and get us all to the surface.” he concluded.

She nodded and hummed in both understanding and admiration. It was a simple plan, but she didn’t see any obvious flaw in its simplicity. Well, apart from the part where they would have to actually fix the machine, but since Sans said it had been fully functional at some point, why wouldn’t they succeed again?

She believed in his plan. It might take a while to actually reach the last step; but they would succeed, and they would bring everyone the Happy Ending they deserved.

“anyway, uh…” He now seemed back to his friendly and slightly dorky side, although he appeared a little… tense? Anxious? “i hope i can trust you not to do anything stupid with your time powers, now.”

“Of course not!” She seemed almost offended he could even think of bringing up the subject, but she might have expressed her thoughts a little too indignantly when she saw him stiffen and sink a little in his chair. She immediately cowered back in the sofa. “I-I mean, uhh, even if I wanted to Reset or something like that, I don’t even know how that’s supposed to work from here. So, either way, I’m positive you have nothing to worry about.”

“… heh. right.” He had appeared to squint his eye-sockets in an indecipherable manner. He didn’t seem to distrust her anymore, but… apparently, he still found the need to add a small precision: “i mean, even if you did that, that’d be pretty stupid. if you erase this timeline, you’ll erase your ride home too, so… i wouldn’t do that if i were you.”
… Right. That too. She still had no idea how he had brought her inside the game, but she was certain that it involved a device that had not always been available to him, and it had probably taken him a while to build it in the first place.

A heavy silence fell, during which she tried to process everything that had been said so far. It appeared to her as simple and logical, but… if only on the emotional side, that was already a lot more to take in. There were so many implications to the game being real, and…

“I… I had another question.” She hesitated again, but once again Sans gestured her to continue with a calm nod. “How did you figure out all this?”

The dorky cheerfulness in his pupils seemed to fade instantly. They wandered around for a few seconds as she heard him take another deep breath, but he quickly answered nonetheless.

“let’s… say that’s the tricky part.” he chuckled tensely, as he seemed to be avoiding her look. “that’s some kind of work i started in a previous timeline and… somehow, i don’t remember the details of how i came across those discoveries for the first time. those plans just happened to survive the last time jumps. my computer here can still ‘save’ virtual data, like blueprints or… well, that’s also what i use to save my memory, actually; so that’s where i eventually found the plans too.

He decided against saying it out loud because he didn’t want her to worry and go back to her paranoia mode from earlier, but… He had to admit, that was suspicious. It was pretty fishy that some data from a certain timeline could have been saved, while some other data from the exact same timeline — say, his memory — had not been retained for some reason, by the very same device that was supposed to save both without making any difference.

Now that he could stop worrying about having his work potentially erased due to time being rewound without warning, and now that he could actually focus his energy and thought on basically anything else…

That was fishy. That was extremely fishy.

“they do look really familiar, and that old thing only responds to my magic signature, so i’m sure i’m the only one who could’ve possibly done the calculations and the spectrum measures at some point anyway. but as for the details of how i got the idea to make THAT kind of measures in the first place… sorry, can’t help ya.” He gave her a half-reassured look and added: “don’t worry though, i redid them all just in case, during this timeline, and i got the same results. i mean… you’d figure i wouldn’t accept that the anomaly comes from a video game unless i got some REAL proof, right…?”
For the first time, Dawn actually started to doubt him. She felt like he was hiding something from her, and yet this ‘thing’ he was hiding from her was not so hard to figure out. What he had just said was not making much sense; she didn’t know how this ‘saving’ thing worked at all, so maybe the contradiction she saw was simply due to a similar misunderstanding to the one during which Sans believed she had lied to him, but…

He knew how the full mechanisms worked, and he was finding this suspicious too. Had it been… dangerous to bring her here without having solved this contradiction first?

Some people are just too smart for their own good.

She seemed on the verge of asking him for further details and explanations, but an unexpected event stopped her before she even had the time to open her mouth.

The neon lights on the ceiling started flickering, and after a few seconds, they remained lit.

They both stared at the ceiling in surprise for a short moment, but the monster was the first to properly react. Then again, although a relieved wide grin appeared on his face, he didn’t turn his gaze away from the lights.

“finally. they really got me worried there.”

The human directed a pair of confused eyes towards him— and they instantly froze in place.

This was the first time she actually could see him fully, in all his real details, under a full light. She… wasn’t certain of what she had been expecting, really. He didn’t look nearly as terrifying as he did before when they were both stuck in the dark; nonetheless, this sight was… puzzling.

Somehow, although she thought she should have been prepared for this by now, seeing a skeleton moving fully on its own was still quite a shock; and now that she could see all of his subtle movements with an enhanced precision, the contrast between the life that was so obviously infused in him and the so obviously non-organic bones…

The strangest part was the fact that she simply couldn’t tell whether these bones were solid or not; it was almost as if their texture changed constantly depending on whether he wanted them to move or not… Was that how magic bodies worked? Purely through the monster’s intent? Given the fact that the game said their bodies were attuned to their souls, maybe that was literally it.

Still, she just… couldn’t wrap her mind around the fact that his skull looked like hard, solid bone, and yet he could shift its shape just however he wanted it, somehow. And wait, it looked like his chest was rising and falling— was he actually breathing? How?! He didn’t have lungs, did he…?
“you okay there, bud?”

She jerked awake from her trance and felt her cheeks start to slowly redden in embarrassment. Of course he had caught her staring.

“S-sorry. I was just…” Okay she really didn’t want to bring that sort of uncomfortable topic. She decided she should instead change the subject and pointed towards the ceiling. “What just happened?”

“i guess alphys finally managed to reboot the core. i, uh… i think i maaaaay have overloaded it pretty badly when i used my machine to bring you here. got me worried for a while that, uh… the damage might’ve been too serious and it could’ve… well. let’s just say we’re lucky that didn’t happen.”

… Yikes. So it wasn’t just a local blackout. He had caused a nationwide power outage just by kidnapping her. Wow.

Sans stood up from his chair, then walked towards his desk. After turning off the now useless desk lamp, he started arranging a few papers into piles, went to check how badly his computer had taken the shutdown, sighed in relief at some point— it looked like nothing too bad had happened to its system or files, fortunately. When she remembered that he had said this was the same device responsible for keeping his data and memory safe throughout the Resets, she felt all the more relieved for him.

She hesitated at first, but when curiosity won over her nervousness, she eventually stood up herself and quietly walked towards the desk, observing from afar.

“Can I help with something?” He blinked in surprise, then turned his skull towards her with two wide perplexed pellets.

“Oh, you’re…” He stopped himself before he could say the legendary ‘still here?’ and completely sound like the dorky scientist cliché, as he suddenly felt self-conscious and stupid. Of course, where else would she have gone anyway? So instead, he added: “nah, don’t worry, i got this. don’t think you could help with much anyway. you wouldn’t happen to have a degree in magic entanglement physics, would you?”

“No, not really…” She knew he had meant it as a joke, yet she looked down in shame and
disappointment.

“i mean. magic isn’t even supposed to be a thing where you come from. right?” She wanted to ask him how he could even know that to begin with, but he wasn’t looking at her, so he completely ignored her startled look. “you know, it’s… funny. you’re taking all this a lot better than i expected. well, not that i’m gonna complain ‘bout that.”

“I’m… pretty much just doing my best not to freak out right now.” she laughed meekly with a strained smirk. “But seriously, if there’s something I can do, don’t hesitate to tell me. I know I can’t exactly make calculations like you and I’d understand if you didn’t want to see me anywhere near your machine, but…”

“You can keep chattin’ if you want. doesn’t bother me.” he chuckled sincerely. He couldn’t help but sigh and add in a melancholic yet hopeful mutter: “it’s… nice to finally have a real chat, for a change.”

Oh crap. He had sounded almost happy when saying that, but it only made the realization all the more heartbreaking when it struck.

Ever since the beginning, he had been stuck in numerous time loops during which he was the only one ever remembering that anything was wrong, and worst of all, he had forced himself to keep the act no matter what. He must have been so lonely and hopeless…

No wonder having someone completely new around him, someone who could also empathize with his situation if ever so slightly, had such surprising effect on him. She was finally starting to better understand why he had become so chatty and friendly all of a sudden.

At first, she had assumed that he was just keeping the attitude he would mention during his fight in the Genocide run: that he would force himself to befriend the ‘Anomaly’ in order to get on its good side. This would have been sad, but almost… expected, coming from him.

But now… Just then, with this one sentence, she finally realized that it wasn’t even about that anymore. She had seemed to regain his trust as soon as he had been proved that she had been honest all along; and from that moment onwards, he had opened up so easily to her…

Maybe he just genuinely needed someone he could have a nice chat with? He wasn’t answering all the questions she had, but he didn’t seem to mind her being in what was supposed to be the most secret place he owned; and if it truly contained the machine he used to save his memory, this was also the place that made him the most vulnerable.

This really had to mean that he trusted her; and he did so to an extent she would have never thought possible of him.
Maybe he was just so tired… he didn’t even care about secrets anymore. He was thinking that this was going to be the end. Just by looking at him, and knowing that he could remember the Resets—he had definitely seen the Surface at some point. He had explicitly stated that this was his ultimate goal. Reach the Surface, settle a new life, and finally move on along with everyone. So… Maybe he just wanted to get most of his burdens over with before leaving.

He would have enough physical weight to move to the Surface anyway; the psychological ones that weren’t needed were better left behind in the Underground.

She had stayed by his side for the first few minutes, but soon enough, watching him in silence started to get boring, especially since she could hardly understand what he was writing down. Part of her was surprised when she realized that she couldn’t see any trace of Wingdings anywhere and that his handwriting didn’t look like Comic Sans at all, but then again, his blueprints and scribbles didn’t need to be written in an illegible font to be nearly indecipherable.

… Also, after bending like this for too long, her neck might eventually get a crick.

So she silently left him at his work, contemplating the rest of the room for a bit. Before she knew it, she was just a few feet away from the purplish curtain that was supposed to cover what was implied by the game to be an old busted machine of some kind. So, this was the infamous machine he had mentioned earlier? And his plan involved fixing it…

She still wanted to avoid getting too close to it. Despite what Sans had said, she deeply felt like she was intruding; and she was certain that this machine in particular…

She was certain he wouldn’t have actually wanted her anywhere near it, under more normal circumstances — if he didn’t think that she knew about his secrets already.

The game’s canon and the theories she had read implied that this machine held some deep connection with him; maybe it had some sentimental value, or it represented something potentially depressing in his past…

Maybe it was completely irrelevant. Or maybe it had to do with the elusive Dr. W. D. Gaster and his tragic demise.

She was in the most perfect place if she wanted answers to her questions, and the best part of it was that Sans seemed to be willing to answer practically all of them, as long as she bothered to openly ask them.

But… It wasn’t fair. As much as curiosity ate her from the inside, she just couldn’t bring herself to ask too much.

Maybe the reason he was answering her questions had nothing to do with him actually wanting to talk about it: the real reason could be anything. Maybe her being human and the newest Anomaly made him wary or intimidated by her and he thought that satisfying her curiosity was the best way
to stay on her good side and keep her from potentially abusing her time-related powers for whatever reasons. Maybe he had become so nihilistic, he thought that it was pointless to try to keep anything from her since she already knew way more than she should and could just as well piece everything together if she became nosy, so maybe answering everything right off the bat would prevent her from being nosy and potentially start messing with his things… She did not bother trying to find other reasons he could have thought about, and there was a very simple reason for this:

These were all terrible reasons to have him talk about his problems.

“you can remove the blanket if you want, you know. i think it just might make it easier to look at it.”

She shrieked in surprise, jumping about three feet to her side. Somehow, Sans had appeared right next to her without warning, literally coming out of nowhere, and he had taken that opportunity to give her a giant grin and did he just meme her?

As soon as he saw her terrified expression and heard her scream though, his grin literally melted away. As much as his permanent grin could fade, at least; it was a very subtle shift, just noticeable enough to show that he had actually stopped smiling.

Dawn mimed some coughing before apologizing for overreacting, muttering she just wasn’t used to people teleporting around her, but it had sounded like she was dismissing the actual reason behind her fright, somehow. He sent her a confused look, but soon his pupils flashed with a wave of understanding, and… actual guilt? They darted in the opposite direction, running away from her.

“… did i really spook you that badly?”

He had sounded so… small. The sheepish and strained smile on his face, and the way he had shifted his skull away from her, made her realize that he was actually blaming himself for her reaction. Did he think that he had gone too far? But this was just a prank! And it was her fault for being so easily startled by such obvious and cheap tricks.

She didn’t remember him pulling that specific one in the game, but given all the other jokes he did, everyone could, and had imagined him doing it at some point.

The fanon had definitely made a lot of comics or jokes where he would appear out of nowhere in order to scare people and make it sound like he had been watching them all along. She thought most of the situations where that joke would happen were cases where someone had wronged Papyrus in some hilarious and stupid way, like accidentally swearing in his presence or telling him the truth about his spaghetti. This was never a prank meant to be taken seriously, and this was
certainly not a prank he was supposed to feel bad for.

“O-oh, uh,” She was stuttering. She hated when she couldn’t stop her stuttering. “I just t-tend to be affected even b-by the cheapest jump-scares… Even when they’re obvious, they always get me, and everyone else laughs ‘cause it makes me look stupid…”

“i, uh… i meant earlier.”

What do you mean earli— oh.

Right… That moment when gravity had gave in and she had been given the front row seats to a wonderful prelude of Sans’s infamous bad time, had he been actually serious with his threats. Okay, maybe she still had trouble erasing these horrifying images from her memory even though they had both agreed not to talk about that event ever again and to deny it had ever occurred.

“You… really seemed to take it a lot harder than i thought you would.” he eventually muttered. “Guess it took you off guard ‘cause you really had no idea what i was doin that for, but even then…”

… Of course he had noticed. Even before she had realized herself, at that.

His pupils slightly flashed to a cyan color for a split second as he stared at her chest. The small glowing orbs hadn’t changed in form or size and the effect only lasted for a second before they returned to their usual white and he turned his skull away from her, but a shiver had still crawled its way up her spine against her volition.

“I… W-well okay it’s not j-just that. But it’s n-not your fault. I’ve just always… had t-trouble with things related to…” She gulped. She really didn’t want to have that discussion right now. “It’s… L-look it’s pretty embarrassing and it’s r-really not important.”

“aw, c’mon.” he retorted jokingly. “t’s not like i could tell anyone you know ‘bout it.” He winked and nudged her jokingly, but she stiffened slightly and unconsciously when his elbow invaded her personal space. His smile dropped as soon as he noticed and he swiftly retracted his arm in response.

“Let’s… j-just say there’s a reason why I really can’t watch horror movies.” She was desperately trying to avoid his look but somehow her eyes couldn’t help but go back to staring at him every time she managed to pull them away from him, as if she were anxiously dreading his reaction.
Her answer hadn’t seemed to give him as many clues as she had imagined. He pondered her sentence for a bit, but then he appeared to reach a conclusion, whether correct or erroneous. And then he just had to ask that question.

“you mean it has to do with ‘evil scary monsters’ or some stuff like that?” Funnily, he didn’t seem offended by the idea. Almost amused, actually. Or just confused. It was hard to read his expression. “i uh, don’t actually know what humans put in their horror shows. ‘specially ones from another world where magic doesn’t exist. are ‘evil monsters’ stories a thing?”

“Uh, I-I guess so, but… I mean…” Okay that was becoming way too embarrassing and she felt like she really would not find any way to change the topic by now. Just peachy. She was starting to feel her entire face redden and get warmer by the second and she really just wanted to wrap this up by now.

“i wonder what stupid stuff you could’ve thought about.” he stated out loud. And he was grinning. Okay now he was just doing this to mess with her, she knew it, and dang it this was making her look ridiculous and he loved it. “if magic doesn’t exist, then what sort of stuff could give you ideas for horror stories? unless you don’t need magic to still think about the possibility? guess that’d explain how you still get what’s going on around here even if you don’t know much about the concepts from this reality.”

“No, look, you just don’t…”

She was face-palming with both hands as an attempt to hide her face in shame, now almost as red as her flannel shirt. He nudged her again, this time more gently than the time before, once more encouraging her to tell him, because if he had been sharing some of his secrets with her it was only right for her to return the favor and God damn it what a troll.

Oh for Pete’s sake what the hell she’d just say it and get it over with already.

“I can’t stand stuff related to DEATH.” Her arms flung around in exasperation. “Okay? Corpses, blood, that stuff, it’s always creeped me out and I even started to see a therapist three years ago in order to try and tone it down because that’s a completely stupid thing to be scared of. Happy now?”

He just… blinked. The revelation appeared to take a few seconds before it sank in… Ooh, right. Now that he was thinking back of his time on the Surface, that sort of behavior did ring a bell.

“i… already was a skeleton even back when you were watchin the game, right? i mean ok you
didn’t play it, but you still knew a lot of stuff so you must’ve—”

“Yes-I-know-and-I’m-sorry-to-tell-you-that-but-you-just really don’t look like the game sprite or the fanarts and OH MY GOD I’m sorry that’s REALLY NOT how I wanted to put it.”

Sans watched the human scowl in embarrassment and bury her head in her arms while spinning away from him overdramatically, and at first he couldn’t help but laugh at her childish demeanor. But then, as he managed to regain control over his breathing, he started to realize.

Maybe she just… wasn’t actually done with the existential crisis problem, now that he was taking a moment to think about it. Hadn’t she mentioned that she was still “trying her best not to freak out”, just a few minutes earlier? Yeah, that was what she had said…

“Look.” She buried her head back in her hands and sighed. “I… I’m sure I’m just a bit on edge because of everything that happened, and now I’m overreacting and you must be thinking I’m acting stupid or— is specism a thing? I-I’m n-not… but… Ugh. You don’t… I-it’s really not so bad. You looked a lot scarier in the dark is all. A-and I’m sure the ‘blue-light-from-under-your-face’ trick didn’t help when I was in the air and…” Her eye twitched awkwardly. “But. That was earlier. Just— gimme some time. It’ll get better. So… C-can we just drop that conversation now? Please?”

He tilted his skull towards her, studying her in silence. She pursed her lips and felt her face blush once more, so she forcefully looked away and tried to take deep breaths. That made him chuckle bluntly once more, she gave him an embarrassed yet betrayed look, and he apologized, now laughing twice as hard as he shook his skull.

“heh… ok, if you insist. but… joke aside? you really don’t need to beat yourself over it that much. i’ve been on the surface before, so i’ve seen how humans react to us in general. and these humans were already used to magic. to some extent.” She sent him a shy look. His smile grew a bit, as he shrugged jokingly. “before we met… i can’t exactly say i hadn’t seen it coming. even if you knew me already, i guess some things just can’t be helped.”

She sighed guiltily. “I guess humankind isn’t exactly known for its tolerance, huh? Not that I’m putting any good example right now…” she muttered in shame.

“naaaaaah. honestly, you’re not doing too bad. ‘specially if it’s some phobia material you were talkin’ about. hard to believe you have one at all.”

“Well I did get over my fear of Halloween decorations two years ago.” she smirked. Then when
she saw his confused expression she realized that he probably didn’t know what ‘Halloween’ was.
“Uuh… I just meant to say, i-it’s obvious that you’re alive and all, and that’s what counts. As long
as I don’t see anything die or already dead, things should be fine.”

This time, his chuckling had sounded a lot darker and forced. Her smile dropped.

… She suddenly remembered what she had previously theorized regarding the outcome of the
timeline they were currently in. Then again, she had reached that conclusion through assuming that
Sans could not remember the Resets, so maybe…

“good thing you’re late to the show, then.”

There was a long and tense pause.

“What… happened exactly?” She gulped in anticipation. “Which timeline is this? A-am I saying it
right…?”

“i killed Frisk.” His pupils darkened and darted away, his skull tilting down in shame. His
expression seemed to be composed of sadness, concern, relief…? She was not really sure how she
should interpret it. “… t’was around a month ago.”

There was only one way it could have been possible for him to do that. A strong silence filled the
room. Her stomach sank and she bit her bottom lip, but she didn’t give him any noticeable reaction
to his speech. A few seconds later though, her head tilted in sudden realization:

“But… wait. I-if Frisk died, then what happened to their soul? I m-mean, that makes your
remaining seventh human soul, right…? And, you killed them before they killed Asgore, so… Did
he break the Barrier or something?”

“no. the kid’s soul disintegrated a few seconds after their death, as usual.”

She gave him a blank look, but then remembered the way ‘Game overs’ worked and how the little
red heart would indeed shatter each time the player’s HP reached zero. That was… strange, and sad
for them, but… She wasn’t sure what to think of such situation, she realized.

Was Frisk actually ‘alive’ the same way Sans and the others were? They never were in control of
anything during the game, not even of their own body as it seemed, so it was hard to tell. In fact,
seeing how they were the one being permanently controlled either by the player or by Chara, she
hoped that they didn’t have that sort of sentience the other monsters did.

Even if they appeared to live in a virtual world and as such could only be ‘artificial intelligences’ of some kind, Sans had proven to her that their emotions and feelings were very real. Being forced to be sentient yet not having any possibility to do anything at all… Well, she had read a few fanfics about this kind of situation already, and no matter the quality of these fanfics, the tragedy they described could easily be empathized and lamented about. When she thought over the situation under a purely logical perspective, however, she rationalized that this situation, while not impossible, would feel unnecessary.

Although she was not herself a specialist when it came to programming and data manipulation, one thing she was certain about was that if something was unnecessary in a program, that feature was either dummied out, or entirely removed. If Frisk were always meant to be the player’s avatar, she thought it to be unlikely for Toby Fox to specifically think of a personality and personal life for them, even if it was to be dummied out afterwards.

So… Part of her felt reassured when she managed to convince herself that, unlike the monsters, it was very likely that Frisk was an actual robot, or some kind of empty shell ready to be taken over by the players. This also would mean that whenever the monsters were killing them… Well, unlike when the players would kill monsters, it meant that they truly weren’t actually hurting anyone, even if they weren’t aware of it.

Then again, if she tried to refine this perspective by turning the situation the other way around… If Frisk always was just a decoy created by the video game as some sort of MacGuffin, it would also explain why their soul could never be taken by anyone. Chances were, this little red heart wasn’t even a real SOUL to begin with.

“well… i guess it’s for the best anyway. if we could get to the surface right now, it’d be to wage war against humans. and i think we both know how that would’ve ended.”

She bit her lip, looked away and nodded tensely. He sighed again. As much as she could easily convince herself that Frisk’s SOUL probably meant nothing… It didn’t change the impact their arrival in this world had on the real people that already lived inside. How many monsters were there? The game only showed a few dozens of them at best, but a few more were mentioned, and who knows? Maybe there were more, even if the game never gave the players the opportunity to meet them. And they were all…

They were all suffering the same way Sans had.

They couldn’t remember the Resets, but still, the fact of thinking of Papyrus, Undyne, Alphys, Toriel, Asgore, Mettaton… And there were so many others her mind hardly dared mention by name, as she felt that her eyes had started to sting.
They all suffered so much from the actions of the game; the realization that thinking about the fate of the ‘main characters’ was just the tip of the iceberg and that now, *every single inhabitant* of the Underground was actually a single individual with independent memories and feelings of their own…

She felt like gulping, or saying something, *anything*; but her throat was completely dry.

“In any case… i actually had a question for you.” She tilted her head in surprise; he was avoiding her look at first, but after he took a short breath, his two shining pupils dashed in her direction. “It’s just… from the point when the game took over, we hardly had any break at all. time’d usually jump back within the next few minutes if frisk died, or within the next twenty-four hours if they reach the barrier, or… well, sometimes if they get killed repeatedly, they also take longer to come back.”

“Might be when the player rage-quits…” she promptly muttered under her breath; seeing her low tone and absorbed look, Sans realized that she probably had not meant to actually say it out loud.

“… yeah. maybe. anyway…” He sighed, enlarging the pause to better gain her full attention: “This is literally the first time there hasn’t been a time jump in over a month. i was just curious about it, y’know. so… by any chance, would you know about something that could explain it? did anything happen with that game during the past month?”

The human lowered her look and squinted her eyes, taking a few seconds to think back as seriously and thoroughly as she could. After a few seconds, her mouth opened again:

“Hm… I think i could think of something, actually…” He widened his eye-sockets immediately, silently yet eagerly urging her to continue: “I mean, it didn’t happen *exactly* one month ago, but… Sometime around the beginning of March, there was an update on the game. Version one-point-zero-zero-whatever.”

“an ‘update’?” he repeated incredulously, then asked hurriedly: “what kind of update?”

“S-sorry, i really don’t know *that* much about it… But now that you mention it, i remember that some of the dataminers were disappointed because they hadn’t noticed anything different. At least, well, nothing ‘interesting.’ The other times we had some new lines of dialogue or new plot features, but… Not this time.”
But then again… What if there had been something different during that update…? It just had to be something that none of them had noticed before. If a change had been introduced, but that this change involved something that they didn’t even know existed in the first place… There was no questioning why nobody would notice it.

“You think it could’ve done something to stop the game from acting here already? Do you think that they found out about you being real and already found a way to solve the problem?” Suddenly, she was beaming and hopeful.

… Hmm. That’s an… interesting coincidence.

Sans seemed unsure. “I… wouldn’t bet on that. but if that’s the case… ’twas about time they did. how long’s been the game out, anyway?”

“Well… I heard there was a free demo available all the way back in 2013, but it was far from being a finished game, so, that one probably doesn’t count.”

She suddenly froze in place, as she started contemplating that option. The only area that could be explored in the demo was that of the Ruins, but then again… As far as she knew, the demo’s plot, dialogue options and looks, were practically identical to the final product, when it came to the part that was effectively available. So if the game’s world was somehow real from the start…

“Wait, no… What if it was already taking effect even back then, too?” Suddenly addressing him, she stared at him with curious yet determined eyes. “Would you remember making a speech with Papyrus where you’d be in a dark place and lying on a deckchair while drinking soda?”

Sans gave her a weird look, surprised she would ever ask such random question, and all the more dumbfounded that she would ask it with a straight face, no less.

Just as quickly, her eyes lost that spark of certainty and she looked down in confusion.

“… Oh wait, never mind, I think that one came from the Kickstarter instead. So… Y-yeah, let’s just ignore the demo stuff.” She gave her a sheepish grin, but it quickly faded. “The finished game came out on September 2015. Which means that by now, it’s been…” She quickly stared at the ceiling as she made the math. “… a bit more than eight months, I guess.”

“eight months…”
He repeated those two words in a heavy tone, pondering about their meaning and their deepest implications. When she realized that he was counting it as the amount of time he had been actually stuck in the time loops, her face dropped and she felt as if something new within her chest had just missed a heartbeat. Except that it didn’t quite feel like her biological heart.

In the end, he just sighed again, running a bony hand on his forehead and taking deep breaths.

“Well… thanks for tellin me, anyway. i don’t exactly know what to do with that info, but… i suppose that’s all we’re gonna get, huh.”

Dawn thought back of the implications of the hypothesis she had made. What if the update truly had this purpose? This would mean that someone in Toby Fox’s team, whether Toby Fox himself or someone else, had eventually found out that the world they had created was somehow alive, and…

Well, the good news was, chances were that they did manage to make it so that even if people from her world kept playing Undertale, these players’ games would stop messing with this world. But she also realized that if the game couldn’t Reset anymore… Then, without Sans’s machine or anyone else able to use that power; it meant that everyone was now completely stuck in one of the worst timelines of all, forever. Did Toby Fox know which timeline he had trapped everyone in, or…?

She realized that when she had brought up this possibility, Sans had felt very uneasy about considering this option. Because if this truly was what had happened, then it could only mean one thing: there was no more purpose for a ‘shield’ against the Resets anymore. But although thinking about this possibility made her feel a little sad for him… She still felt differently about the situation as a whole.

There was a chance that bringing her here was completely pointless when it came to her alleged ability to stop the Resets… But it did not mean that she could not help with literally anything else.

Whether the game still had an effect on this world or not, a Reset still had to be made at some point in order to save everyone, and that very specific Reset would only be done through one specific way. She had the power to make that very special Reset; but this wasn’t what Sans was looking for, and she respected that decision.

So instead, she would help him through any other option she had; she assumed that this would take them a while… But she didn’t mind so much. As long as they were doing this for a purpose, this was what mattered.
“anyway.” Sans sighed again after some more silence. “guess that means i should go back to work, now.” He unexpectedly bent his spine backwards and proceeded to pop every single vertebra in his body one after the others while exaggeratedly grunting like an old guy. The human couldn’t help but stare wide-eyed at how was that even possible. He looked at her expression, rolled his eyes overdramatically, and snorted. “fine, you got me, i was messin’ with ya on purpose this time.” That troll.

She tried to give him an annoyed glare, but quickly found herself incapable of actually doing it, as she had started giggling uncontrollably at his nonsensical shenanigans.

Before she knew it, her burning forehead was buried within her hands as she couldn’t stop her exhausted and idiotic laughter. She was just… done. She was done.

Well, this wasn’t too bad a situation. But that was just too much all at once and now she needed one hell of a break.

The skeleton observed her for a few seconds, calmly joining her laugh at first, but soon he just shook his head lightly with a goofy smile.

When the human finally managed to take a deep breath and stop her hilarity, he was already back to sitting on his desk, but he still gave her a patient look as soon as he heard her silence. Of course he knew what was going on.

“that being said… in the meantime, well, you can stay here, but i’d understand if you need some time to, uh. let everything sink in or whatever.” She made a nervous smile and her eyes darted away. He chuckled and pointed his skull towards the other end of the room: “door’s unlocked, by the way.”

Dawn hesitated a bit, but she soon came back to look at him in the eye and send him a genuine smile. “I… Thanks. I think I’ll take a little stroll, actually. I think… I need some fresh air after all this.”

As fresh as the air could get in the Underground, that was… Then again, they were in Snowdin, so maybe the cold could help her keep a cool head. She walked towards the end of the room and only stopped when her hand went to rest on the knob. Just before leaving, she added:

“I won’t be too far, don’t worry.”
The monster didn’t really seem to care about that last part, as he was already too deep into his thoughts and merely sent her an absent-minded wave before he muttered something that sounded like “yeah whatev, t’s not like y’could go anywhere.”, probably without he realized it.

… Right. That too. It was very likely that his house was the only place where she would be welcomed at all, here.

She had expected to directly meet up with freezing air, snow and pine trees as soon as she would open the door upstairs, but surprisingly, after climbing the stairs and opening a second one, she instead ended up indoors.

To be more specific, after a few more steps forward, she realized that she was now standing in the middle of the living room of Sans’s and Papyrus’s house. Huh.

Under other circumstances, she would have paused to question why there was such an obvious inconsistency with the game… But instead of this, as soon as she devoted more attention to her new surroundings… Once more, something foreign yet familiar in her chest sank.

The couch was missing obviously, since Sans had put it in the basement for some reason; but even if she overlooked this element… She actually had a hard time recognizing the place. It looked so different than the one from the game; not because any notable detail would truly be out of place; but the atmosphere of the ensemble was enough to give her a rush of sadness and guilt.

Was this… what the house looked like when there was nobody to take care of it anymore…?

Sans had said that the Genocide had occurred about a month earlier. This house… Papyrus had been gone for an entire month. As had everyone else.

Sans had definitely not spared any time for maintaining the life and warmth in this place; not only because of his alleged laziness, but most probably, as she theorized, because he had been way too busy with his work related to otherworldly shenanigans to focus on something as trivial as housework.

Without Papyrus… This house truly had lost its life, as well.

This… was just too much to watch. She gulped, then rushed towards the front door and ran outside, the snow cracking under her footsteps. She stopped only a few feet away from the house, standing in place and gawking around her.

The town. Snowdin Town. This town was real.

The Underground was real. And it was empty.
If she had been keeping any doubts over whether this entire situation was real or not, this was what would have made them vanish for good. On her left side stretched an unending snowed path filled with fog and pine trees, and on her right laid an oh-so-familiar town.

Or at least, the empty and dark buildings of a town.

Was the Underground always supposed to be so dark? If they had been on the surface, she would have believed that the sun had set hours earlier and that no stars were visible due to unfavorable weather conditions; but when she looked at what was supposed to be the sky, she only saw pure blackness. Her eyes weren’t nearly sensitive enough to distinguish whether there was anything special on the ceiling or if it was merely composed of stone, but seeing how dark the surroundings were… She really hoped that the monsters didn’t have to deal with this darkness constantly: the only visible light around was coming from the house right behind her. As for the rest… Everything else was dead. This really had become a ghost town.

After some time, surprisingly, this view stopped affecting her so deeply. At first, she feared that she was distancing herself from this cruel reality, that maybe as some sort of coping mechanism she had tried to protect herself by not caring about the horrors of this world anymore, and that she was starting to respond to this situation in a fully apathetic manner; but soon, she understood what this rising feeling was.

It was probably born out of some frustration or anger in response to the unfairness of this situation, but when the features on her face hardened, only the sudden realization almost managed to break this expression, when the thought made her crack a small and sad ironic smile.

She was filled with determination.

She stopped caring about this horrendous situation, because deep inside this familiar yet strange *something* in her chest, she *knew*. She knew this wasn’t the end.

She believed in Sans’s plan. She would help him all the way. She knew they would succeed.

They would do it, together. They would save everyone.

Now that she had been reminded of it… She felt some small guilty curiosity. Well, she wasn’t sure why this curiosity made her feel guilty, because as long as she wouldn’t use it as an excuse to make selfish and dangerous decisions, it was fine; but… She was inside the game, and she was supposed to be the one in charge, right?

She really wanted to know what the consequences to this fact were. What were her SOUL’s stats? Would she find some SAVE Points around the Underground? How would ‘SAVING’ work? She had made a point ahead of time that even if given the opportunity to do so, she obviously wouldn’t try to figure out how ‘Resetting’ worked; but ‘SAVING’ wouldn’t hurt anybody, right? If anything,
it only ensured that their progress would be, well, ‘Saved’; this was a good thing!

She quickly squinted her eyes as she tried to look in the distance towards the other end of the town; there was supposed to be a SAVE Point over there in the game, right between the Snowed Inn and the Shop… but sadly, she couldn’t find anything.

The air really was cold; she could see her own breath, and even though this wouldn’t normally deter her since she was used to seeing this in her home town every year during the winter season, this time was different. It was supposed to be the beginning of May in her own world: her current outfit was definitely not fit for an expedition in the coldest area of the Underground, that was for sure.

She would have thought of taking the ‘Undersnow Tunnels’ and exploring more thoroughly the other side of the town in order to check whether the SAVE Point was there or not, but the cold was already starting to get to her, and given how dark the place seemed to be… She certainly did not want to find herself alone in a ghost town at the darkest hour of the day. Even if the SAVE Points looked like small stars in the game, chances were, they weren’t truly shining any true light, so she wouldn’t be able to see them in such darkness anyway.

And again… what need would they have for a SAVE File, in the end? It wasn’t like they would go back to anything, and if Sans was right about his plan, soon, nobody else would ever be able to.

She heard some distant footsteps in her back. They came from inside the house, as she had stupidly left the door open. She turned towards Sans and sent him a shy smile.

“hey, uh… ‘dawn’, right?” He stopped patiently right at the entrance of his house, his shadow spreading over the snow below their feet. “just wanted to say, it’s almost time for dinner. you hungry?”

Dinner already, huh…? Somehow, it felt like her biological clock claimed that it was too early for that. So she shrugged, then shook her head while pursing her lips in a dorky pout.

“… Not really. How about you?”

“just a bit.” He shrugged too. Then his eyes darted to the side, reluctantly. “… still have to go, though.”

“Where are you going?” she asked immediately, her eyes reflecting some curiosity among her confusion.
“hotland. since, uh, y’know, the survivors sheltered in the lab and stuff.” His left hand got out of his hoodie’s pocket and went to scratch the back of his skull awkwardly. “sorry i’m not offering you to come along, but… i guess you understand why i can’t really bring you around.”

… Right. Near-Genocide ending.

Her brain quickly formed a mental image of how everyone in the True Laboratory would freak out after Sans would have brought a human through a shortcut only a month after an even younger human had been responsible for killing everyone they knew… Yeah. Bad idea.

“i’ll try to be quick, but just in case something happens… worst case scenario, i should be back in an hour and a half. can you wait till then?” She nodded confidently, and his smile seemed to become a little more genuine as his look somewhat softened. “okay then. see ya. in the meantime just, i dunno, do whatever you want.”

“Yeah… To be honest? I thought of something.”

Sans raised a nonexistent eyebrow in surprise, silently inciting her to explain:

“I know that everything here’s going to be Reset once we’re done fixing your machine and all, so it won’t matter in the end and everything, but…” She took a deep breath. “We’re still going to be stuck here for a while, before you launch the Reset. Right?”

“uh…” He turned his skull away, deep in thought yet also a bit embarrassed. “i guess so…? it’ll probably take a few weeks at best, true…”

“Right. So… I just thought. We’re going to be living here for a while. And since I’m going to stay here, I’d like to be useful. So, I don’t know if you’ll let me help you fix the machine, but in the meantime…? There’s something else in this house that needs some fixing, too. Or some cleaning or whatever.” She sent him an unsure look. This still wasn’t technically her house, so if only for courtesy, she still had to ask for his approval first: “You wouldn’t mind, would you?”

He seemed to give so little care to the matter, the fact that she asked him that question actually surprised him deeply.

“well… sure? knock yourself out?” He scratched his skull again, completely confused. “just, uh. please leave the basement out of this.”
“Of course. Then again,” she jokingly raised her eyes slyly and theatrically rubbed her chin with a 
pseudo-pensive look and a smug grin, “I could always try to rearrange your papers in alphabetical 
order.”

Sans’s expression was now only that of two wide empty eye-holes and a strained horrified smirk. 
“PLEASE DON’T.”

His face was genuinely horrifying, but she could see that it was a threatened expression instead of a 
threatening one; thus, although she had instinctively looked away, she had immediately burst in 
loud laughs. “Oh, come on! Anyone could’ve seen from a mile away that I was kidding.”

“i know. but even thinking about something so sadistic. this is evil. only an evil mastermind could 
do something so twisted.”

“Yes.” She attempted her best impression of a villainous smirk. “I’m the evilest human you’ll ever 
see. Your basement will be so perfectly clean and polished, your feeble eyes won’t even be able to 
look at it. You’ll never be able to approach your machine because its reflection will be so bright, 
it’ll blind you with its cleanliness.”

“well, i knew it. no soap, evil human. if you keep going down this dirty path, i’m afraid i’ll have to 
polish you too.” And there they were, laughing like idiots and taking over the conversation where 
the other had left it off, only to make it even more nonsensical. When Sans managed to regain 
control over his hilarity, he perked a quick glance at the watch on his left wrist: “… heh… welp. 
guess i really should go, or they’re gonna start to worry.”

Dawn nodded encouragingly. He sent her a friendly wave in return, to which she responded with a 
thumbs up.

And then he disappeared. She hadn’t seen him moving or anything (no, not even a snap of fingers), 
but he had merely vanished in an instant, just like that.

… Welp. Here was a shortcut, then.

Anyway. She had about an hour and a half before dinner, right? She might as well get started.

Read via Screenshots Here (full formatting but may encounter loading issues)
BOY did that take a while. Sorry for the long wait, there's been a bunch of things that got rewritten over and over again, and other details that were introduced literally at the last moment. Hopefully the next chapters won't take so long to write. In the meantime, I hope you'll enjoy this one!

Learn When to Quit

— Act 1 —

Don’t Let Him Find Out

Scene 3.1

» Read the PDF version here! «

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Sans’s shortcut to the Hotland lab facilities was executed without a hitch. He perked a few warter left and right out of habit before getting out of the shadows, then casually made his way to the front inside the main building. A button was pressed patiently waited for the elevator down to the basement.

Until the main door opened again and someone walked in his direction.

“Oh. Howdy, Sans! Long time no see.”

He froze in place, mentally cursing his luck. This would not do. When he had told the human that she would have to stay for an hour and a half at most, it was definitely not the case. He had actually meant to stay for that long. He preferred telling her that she would have to wait longer than having her worry or expect him to come soon; nothing more.
He had planned to just get in, grab the grub, and get out before anyone truly had the time to notice he had been there. Or, well, he wanted to get to see enough monsters to let them notice his presence, if only enough to meet someone he actually knew and wind up in an awkward conversation for who knew how long.

So, of course, of all the monsters he could have greeted with, it just had to be him. Sans inhaled swiftly and nervously, then turned and raised his skull as far up as his spine could carry it. Here stood Asgore.

“oh, uh... h-heya. y-your majesty?” He started to give a small wave. Then he stared at his hand, wondering if that was respectful enough or if he was supposed to follow some sort of protocol that he did not know about. “i just, uh... went for the gru... i mean a y’know. heh eh.”

The Boss Monster gave a deep, but genuine laugh, seeing the skeleton’s nervousness.

“Of course you did.” he muttered jovially, bending forward slightly and letting an amused, desperately morose spark glimmer in his eyes. “You of all monsters deserve a... every now and then.”
every now and then.

“heh, yeah, i do kinda enjoy taking it easy at that, from time to time...” Someone just got out of this. Please.

Sweet mercy, the elevator behind him rang and opened, mechanical doors, distracting the taller monster, if only for an instant. Asgore was not the kind of being to be bothered by these slip-ups and occasional missteps, but if only because he was a member of the royal court, just hard to know how to properly speak to him; in the timeline they were currently in.

Asgore gently gestured him to enter first, so he did, followed silently. Sans pressed the button, then buried his hands in his pockets.

This... was fine.

He was just stuck in a small elevator making small talk with the king of the Underground and all the guards who survived after the murderous rampage of a being who appeared to be a human terrorizing an entire world known as the king who still had six human soldiers for disposal, who had sworn to protect all his royal subjects and was now fully resolved to absorb said human if any true danger were to come again, for example.
appear out of nowhere and be in hiding in his homemade shelter way back in Snowdin Town.

No big deal.

“What were you doing outside of your shelter?” Sans stiffened with just enough discretion so as to not let the other monster know. There had been no suspicion in his voice; rather, a hint of concern, and maybe of confusion. But that just couldn’t help but feel on edge. “I wonder why you preferred staying isolated like this while working on your project? It would have been safer for you to stay in the laboratory. Besides, you have had access to all the material resources the other scientists had at their disposal...”

Even though Sans knew a little bit more about Asgore’s personal life than he should thanks to his acquaintance throughout time and memories of past alternates, they had never been particularly close — especially well, it was hard to get close to a member of the royal family during his reign, even if this particular member was worth it for doing his best to stay as close as possible to his subjects. Still. This Asgore... This was a version he had not been given the chance of getting to know at all.
point during the past timelines, and this was a very real decision I really would have preferred not getting to know...  

“well, y-yeah, but... the machine’s been standin’ the way back there for ages, so i just didn’t feel like movin’ it around... you could say it’s a... family heirloom. y’know. has some sentiment value an’ all that.”

This was an Asgore who loved his subjects more than anything else in the entire world, because the literally the only thing left that he cared about. he felt like he had already failed them when A been unable to contact him in time about the “my human child” issue... This was an Asgore who had grief past him for real.

This was an Asgore who, after witnessing so much horror coming from one single human child, had lost all lingering faith he had in humanity. If a child could be such a demon, what could the adults possibly...

“I... see. Yes. Of course it was...”

Asgore glanced to the side, an obvious feeling of melancholy and nostalgia stirring within. “Why the humans that came down here all have to take so much from all of us... I simply cannot understand.”
This was an Asgore who had lost hope, but who had the will to... get revenge, maybe? Not even certain. The plan was basically the same as before... that contrary to the previous times when he had dealt with Frisk, this specific time, he really was willing through with it. Because if he didn’t, he would go through the risk of losing all he had left.

“oh, humans had nothing to do with his... uh, i-i-it’s got nothin’ to do with all that. it’s just it’s, well, was, his greatest invention and all,

He laughed nervously for a bit. Then he stopped. Better to change the subject.

“What about you? you were...”

He had lost everything for the third time in his life, the previous occurrences had left their own ache, but this last one... It had not even been done by a human at this point, technically speaking; but he truly knew better. The others didn’t know that.

“I was looking after the souls, the King nodded slowly, yet sternly. “We can’t afford to leave them without superv for too long. And even though we do need some volunteers to look after them a time... I simply could not risk the situation.”
times, I simply could not help but... myself, after the blackout occurred.

The elevator stopped. There was a *ding*. The door opened, and Asgore exited first. Sans released a small sigh. He thought the other monster could not hear him. He followed.

Had he been given even the illusion of a choice, he would have obviously chosen a more welcoming timeline. Inviting his special guest around. But sadly, he was not exactly ready to pass up the opportunity he had been given, knowing full well how unlikely it would have been for him to be given a second chance. If he had been brought to this point in time when he had first done everything, he knew he would have done it again.

Then again, now that he thought about it, maybe he should have warned the human about the real danger of exposure and made sure she would stay put. His entire body was stilled as he stared in the darkness, pondering his options for the duration of exactly 101 seconds and a half. Then he shrugged. Internally...

... *meh. she'll be fine.*

He’d probably just forget when he got back home. Or be too lazy to think about it. But that would be a problem. She already knew the context and the story...
problem. She already knew the context and she much already about pretty much everything they know in the first place: she should be clever enough to figure it out on her own and avoid getting herself into trouble.

As long as they were the only ones ever wandering Snowdin or outside the laboratory, it would be up to her to be discovered by someone else. They just needed to avoid the cameras, but then again, what use would have for going so far into the wilderness?

“Oh, right! I almost forgot.” Asgore tilted his head upwards in sudden realization, his eyes reflecting sound of his exclamation vigorously pulled skeleton away from his thoughts. “You came in time, actually. I was told that A wanted to see you.”

Sans blinked in confusion. “did she, now...?”

“She did. Actually, I believe it related to the power outage from earlier.” A gleam of genuine and somewhat childish sparkles in the taller monster’s eyes before he continued, as if he had just made a hypothesis: “Does it mean that your project has advanced enough so you could a few tests of some sort?”

Ugh. Touché. Not exactly what he had in mind,
hit way too close to the truth for his liking. And not better finish his time machine as fast as possible, if he took too long, the King of the Underground people could start to become suspicious. Just great.

“well i’m not done yet, but... you could say the first half of what had to be done, is done. or The skeleton paused, seemingly considering whether he had in mind really was worth saying... But after a little more about it, he decided that he could give that little bit of credit. He did just manage interdimensional travel real. That did probably at least a little bit of praise.

Slightly despite him, but also because he gladly and his skull ended up smiling with a slight yet almost spark of pride.

“... well, yeah. guess i did make some real progress for science.”

“I am very glad to hear this.” Asgore answered with a satisfied and happy smile spreading on his face. “Well... I will not keep you busy for longer. I am certain that Alphys is looking for you right now. You should not be making her wait.”

The King promptly left him behind, advancing tow
first door on their left. Sans spent some time to collect his thoughts and take a deep breath.

So. Alphys wanted to see him, because of the outage that he had caused during his interdimensional experimental shenanigans. There were so many ways it could go. Obviously, he had no idea what about to tell him, it wasn’t like he could predict from away how she would react after living through outcomes and having known the multiple aspects of personality for who knew how long.

He rubbed the bridge of his nonexistent nose between bony fingers, grumbling under his breath in appraisal.

Better to just get this over with. Chances were, if he come to her, she would find a way to make it to all by herself, and if that happened, she would not.

Still. Grub first.

As soon as he opened the door leading to the multi-purpose room which had been reorganized to serve its new purpose as a dining room and cafeteria of sorts, the noise and crowd overwhelmed him.

Compared to how many monsters lived in the Underside overall, there were never that many of them left run where the kid had been so murderous; but even the Hotland Laboratories’ basement was definitely spacious enough to actually host all of them for a
spacious enough to actually host all of them for a while. Nonetheless, while the majority of the survivors were gradually relocated in New Home just a few days after one of the kids was neutralized, they were still always meeting in the Laboratory whenever they needed something. Clothes. Food. Announcements from the King.

The laboratory had become the most important place in the whole Underground, the Capitol being a close second thanks to its improved security infrastructures, which had been built in a rush after Frisk’s journey, but were still strong enough to stand as impressive fortifications. Still, even though they were not technically there, the laboratory felt safer for a majority of the people given how scared they had been of the outside or losing any more than they already had. More than two weeks before the first team of combat-experienced monsters came out and what had become of the Underground, carefully monitored by the security cameras.

Sans quietly joined the line for the food rations, crafting his strategy. He despised the mere idea of actually going through
what he was about to do, but then again, as long as he didn’t get caught doing it and as long as he had some change this timeline for the better anyway, in the scheme of things, it wouldn’t really matter.

Besides, it was not like he truly had a choice; even in the most regular circumstances, asking for two rations would have raised quite a handful of eyebrows. Of being completely straightforward and casually asking for a second ration because he needed to feed a hiding made him laugh internally, but for the safety of said human and of the entirety of his plan, couldn’t be that blunt.

Among the monsters responsible for preparing food for everyone, as usual he recognized the shopkeepers from Snowdin Town, that ‘Burgerp (he’ll get his real name eventually), and some didn’t personally know, but whose faces he had seen times before every now and then. He carefully the group, the line of the other monsters around were, just like him, waiting for their own dinner displays of packed food rations that were stock way in the back of the room, vastly out of reach everyone in the line and the least supervised of their alleged inaccessibility.

As soon as he saw an open window in time a
where he could exploit a blind spot, he discreetly an arm in what would be commonly considered unconventional direction, and as swiftly as without making any noise, let alone letting anyone that anything was happening, he grabbed a sand was waiting a few dozen feet away from his position, then retracted his arm the other way the shortcut and carefully hid his prize in one of his inner pockets. He threw a few worried glances and out of paranoia, but nobody seemed to have noticed. Now all he had to do was wait for his turn and a own ration, and everything would be fine.

Once finally he was out of the line with one rat hand and the other still carefully hidden in his cloth he glanced at his watch and noticed that he had spent forty whole minutes in that mess. Ugh. Could just find a shadowed corner and warp his way Snowdin while no one was looking? He’d just plus couldn’t find Alphys. He had spent much longer had wanted to already, so...

“A-hem.”

Oh God damn it. Well, at least now he did not need to worry anymore whether or not he should bother to actually look lizard scientist, since she had very obviously found
hazard scientist, since she had very obviously found. Still, was the entire universe playing a trick on him? It looked like awfully unlikely coincidences had kept him up all day long, and that was starting to really rub the wrong way.

“You weren’t actually going to without even saying hi again, especially after what coincidentally happened to the CORE after it received an unusual energy spike coming from the Snowdin distribution plant, were you?"

... Welp. No more escaping it, now. After conjuring all of his remaining energy into stopping himself from palmimg or sighing too loudly due to his weariness and frustration, the skeleton turned around and pulled his casual, yet too little too obviously fake smile.

“... hey, Al. How’s it going?”

He knew in all honesty that just pretending that he know what was wrong and that everything would be fine was stupid and counterproductive, but then he simply had no idea how else to handle the situation. He was too exhausted to care. He really just wanted this over with and find his way out of here as soon as he could seize his chance.

“I don’t know, Sans.” She rolled her eyes.
shrugged in a mixture between amusement and annoyance, as she very obviously mimicked his teasing attitude. “What do you call a guy who leaves the CORE barely standing, he ran some tests with his quantum physics time-space altering and who doesn’t even show up after to help or apologize, leaving me alone to fix his mess?”

... Yeeeeeaaah, she was pissed. Rebooting the entire and recalibrating each of its features individually, pretty much all on her own, had to have been a headache.

“uh...” Was she expecting him to actually answer or...? Eventually, he just displayed a guilty apologetic grin and muttered the most obvious answer he could think of: “... a numbskull?”

“*A* quarky boronic bosonhead who bar gives a spin about others’ sulfurin could’ve at lithium sent me a before starting his tests instead of having it all lepton me to fix all hadron,” she paused just for long enough to breathe, “AND deal with the scared, angry monsters who had no idea what was all about and never asked for any of this to happen in the first place...
... Sans was, to put it bluntly, genuinely floored. He had stared at her with wide eye-sockets for a good few seconds of stunned silence. Did he just get owned?

Not waiting for his answer, she gave him a silent tip of her hat, pointing the dinner tables all the way back in the lobby, and he followed without giving it much thought. He realized that he would much rather continue the discussion while sitting. He would have preferred a more private and quiet setting, but apparently, she had a say in that one.

"... ok, wow. good job on that one. it was a very impressive coming from you." And he could see that she meant it, at that.

"Thanks! It took me a whole hour to come up with it."

They reached one of the few free tables and took a seat. She actually looked sincerely grateful for that commentary which astounded him and left him for a few seconds curious as to whether she wanted to scold him or to give him. Almost hopeful, even.

When her sarcastic tone came back though, the former option became the obvious one:

"Then again, you gave me all the
to think on it, when I was standing in front of the main generator and doing nothing but wait for it to cool to a level that WOULDN’T risk making the entire Hotlands explode along with it if I gave it even one more task.”

He tried to turn a few sentences in his head in order to write a correct but not-too-obviously standard apology, but it seemed to fail miserably. Then again, maybe he was just too lazy or too tired, and maybe he did not actually care that much about apologizing in the first place.

Well, he had never caused that much damage to anyone before, had he? This scene was supposed to be new. But then again... Alphys’s scolding tended to follow the same pattern. Even if she hadn’t even been angry yet, part of him already knew how it would go if he did anything to intentionally twist things to force him to follow a different path, and this part of him now felt... strangely numb.

Sans tried to remember some old memories from when they still had some good times together. She had become so predictable and dull...?

Seeing his prolonged silence, Alphys eventually removed her glasses with one clawed hand and rubbed her face with the other.
“At least, PLEASE just tell me it wasn’t,” she murmured weakly. “It looks like it but still...” Her look swiftly hardened. “Just you know, I’m not gonna pretend I didn’t see you snatch that sandwich with that weird trick of yours.”

His bones rattled. Did she seriously consider on him...? “look, al, i really...”

She sighed again, her eyes dashing to the floor side as she appeared more conflicted; she seemed reluctant, but also relieved all at the same somehow? “… I know. A certain some gonna need it, right?”

Very subtle, Alphys.

Sans threw multiple terrified glances around the room when he was convinced that no monster around seemed to have heard her (she had thought of her tone, at least), he took a second to sigh in relief he sent her a death glare.

“ok, what was that one for? you really want to get caught or what?” It took him some extra effort to stay intimidating while whispering these questions so that nobody else could accidentally eavesdrop.
The conflicted frown on her muzzle shook distorted itself in a funny way. She tried to read her glasses back in place, but they shook before they regained their balance. “I... I know. I’m sorry, I just... D-do we r-really need to keep that a s-secret from EVERYONE?”

His shoulders rattled slightly as he tensed even more. Stuttering was back, then it could only mean that he was thinking deeply about that issue. It was surprising at first to hear this confession from the very monster who had been keeping similar secrets for years. Almost... funnily ironic. He almost wanted to make a joke from it, but he held himself from doing so at the last moment.

Maybe he shouldn’t point it out. Maybe she, too, was tired of keeping secrets, after all. He could understand that feeling.

“depends. you think you could tell them what happened last month? that whatever happened it doesn’t even matter at all?”

The answer was obvious. Yet, she found herself wanting to say it. What was preventing them from telling that instead of an actual human, the thing that had caused them so much pain and disaster was nothing more
remote-controlled puppet? That the motive behind their misery was not even cruelty or madness, but just lack of knowledge from someone who thought they were playing a video game, and who genuinely believed the lives they had stolen were not real?

What was stopping them from telling everyone what the chances were, the ones who had caused so much and destruction were not so different from any monster. That just because they didn’t know any better... would they have done the same thing without realizing it?

Alphys thought of some of the most popular video games in the Underground. Not all of them were not violent, but the monsters weren’t unfamiliar with games either; she had even been asked to help one of those Massively Multiplayer Online games, although she wasn’t typically one to enjoy video games that much (she vastly preferred mangas and anime and could understand the hype they created).

She thought back of how Undyne had sometimes spent some time on some of these video games, because she was using the excuse that she could use them as a means to create battle strategies, but also because she genuinely enjoyed them.
So now... How would she have reacted if, she suddenly learned that one of these games impacted sentient people?

What was preventing them from telling everyone had been living the scenario of a video game? This was so easy to say. And all at the same time, this was a painful revelation to receive. This was unbelievable because it would seem scientifically absurd— contrary, the theory that could explain how a video game could be controlling their world was so easy to understand. But this was unbelievable because nobody could accept that this could ever be the truth.

Such facts could be received with so many reactions— from anger to hopelessness. Especially after what had happened during the last month... Learning such truth could mean so much. She knew it had had this effect on her.

Papyrus, Undyne, Mettaton, everyone... They had all fought to their deaths. But all their actions, their yet tragic heroism, had been for nothing. Because there never was an ‘enemy’ in the first place. Because this game could have restarted and erased their pain and memories at any point. Because Sans’s plan involved doing exactly that. Erasing everything, one last time.
“It doesn’t even matter at all.” What a terrible thing.
What a horrible truth to keep.

She looked down. Sans was about to add something along the lines of “yeah, thought so.”, but he eventually gave up against it.

“even you can’t accept it, not after what happened.” he muttered with a seemingly detached tone, compassionate look. “can you...?”

“I... I-I want to trust you. A-and e-evidence that... t-they really d-did it.” She cut herself short, trying to regain her composure. When she raised her eyes again to face him, she appeared so empty, yet paradoxically filled with a spark of undecipherable nature. “T-they r-r-r-r-n-never wanted this t-to h-happen, D-did they...?”

She looked about to cry. His shining pupils dimmed slightly as they ran away from this disheartening news.

“don’t think dawn can speak for all of them, at least she understood the situation fast enough judging by her expression, she’s...” He hesitated, trying to find the right words. How could he describe her? He hadn’t really known her for nearly. He didn’t have the words. “...really didn’t...”
enough to judge her properly. "... well. she's a person that's all there is to say. she's a person in her feelings, and a minimum of common sense.gets to understand how we feel, too."

"Dawn... T-that's her name, huh." she on, repressing a stiff giggle. "How did she the whole thing?"

"she, uh. well, it took her a while to just... but it was happenin for real." When he thought back the first conversation he had with her, he could for a bit. "you should've seen it. pretty fun retrospect."

Alphys's muzzle shook a bit as she tried to laugh and the sad expression won over immediately. After seconds, the desperate look was replaced with a frown.

"I just really hope you'll keep that under your watch." she muttered edgily. other one caused enough pain as it The death glare she received from Sans made him uncontrollably.

"Frisk would never have done any of this."
The lizard gave him a dirty look. Even though she
was still surprised that Sans would even keep contact with a human by name despite everything that had happened because of them.

Maybe Sans had been able to forgive all of these... whether they came from their world or whether they were one of those ‘players’, but she knew for a fact that she couldn’t have been such an easy task for anyone. She knew the truth, and she was still struggling to forgive any of them. She wanted to, but the scars were still fresh, and... She just didn’t feel ready to disremember any of her dearest friends’ deaths just yet. They had done so much, all in vain? How could she accept that? How could she accept that?

Part of her reasoned that the only reason Sans could have been able to forgive everyone so easily was because he had been through so many timelines himself... Maybe it was simply stopped caring altogether. It is so much easier to forgive if you weren’t hurt in the first place.

Ever since she learned that he had been able to keep track of the time jumps sometime during the last month he had always refused to tell her how many timelines he had been through, or what he had seen during those
times. The only thing she knew was that at some point, they had made it all to the Surface, and that San’s role involved replaying that timeline once more, at the cost of

*Replaying it.* As if it were just an act. A play he had to rehearse over and over, to the point where he learned his part by heart and could do it in front of an audience without ever stuttering or having to actively recall his memory to remember his lines.

Or, under a different angle, maybe he simply saw it as an experiment whose results had become entirely predictable. Take those reactants, choose carefully the conditions of the reaction’s environment, and you will always obtain the same products with a complete certainty. After all, this is what experiments are about after all.

He had seen them all, repeating every day the same monotonous conversation, like a bunch of broken records, merely because that was what the experiment demanded. He had not remembered the other timelines like he did. He was so tired of hearing the same ‘dialogue’ all over again. Maybe this very conversation they were having right now was the latest iteration of an experiment.

How many times had he lived through it already? He had seen them all die, only to come back to the Surface hours later, over and over... Did he still feel anything when he saw one of them fall to that human? Did he care anything at all towards them, at this point...?
They were his family and friends, and she could still _wanted_ to feel that way towards them, no matter what. But still, in the end of the day... Did he still care about them? He had to care enough, or at least persuade himself that he cared, because of how hard he had worked on his project of his in order to save everyone. But the plan erasing this iteration. Erasing _them_. Erasing her. Did he realize any of this? Probably not. Sometimes selfish for thinking that he was the selfish one. He wanted to save them, after all. She was the one who thought instead of saving _them_, he wanted to save an iteration of them all.

Still, the facts were what they were. Sans probably things under a different perspective, but this was: a _perspective_. Sans wanted to save all more, but in doing so, he was neglecting the ones who were suffering around him, right at this very moment. His plan involved denying that any of their pain existed in the first place. It involved denying that anyone had literally cheated death just to give everyone time to evacuate. It involved denying that Mettaton had sacrificed himself for the sake of saving even more. It involved denying that Papyrus had been willing to put his purest views and put them to the ultimate test. In
denying her own personal growth during this last
She did not want to go back to being the useless
nerd she used to be. She wanted to keep that connection
she had worked so hard to regain during this past year.
She wanted to keep helping everyone, like she had been expected to.

Of course she wanted to save everyone and see her
grandparents happy on the Surface. But... she wanted to be the one to die through the suicide pact. Was that selfish? Was that being greedy for death? Not death, technically. The time jump would erase her memories and send her back to how she was one month earlier.

But... she really didn’t like who she was one month ago. She had changed so much... She had started to piece together the Alphys from last month was the same Alphys as the one she was now.

This was when she had realized...
Even though Sans genuinely cared about everyone,
she didn’t care about them. Even though Sans cared about her, he really didn’t care about her, now.

When she raised a tired look towards him, she had so many questions to ask, so many things to say... But she couldn’t find the words.

Instead, she finally noticed that at some point during the journey, Sans had pulled his helmet over his face.
zoning out, Sans had pulled his phone out of his pocket and started checking it. When she gave him a question, he merely said that he had received a text:

[FROM: Grillby – 08:47 PM]

Hey Sans. First time seeing you here since the beginning of the month. We haven't met in a while, have we? We should hang out sometime. The library isn't available for now, but working in your basement all day must be lonely. You look like you're busy with the Royal Scientist so I won't bother. Give me a sign whenever you want to chat.

The skeleton looked up in the crowd, and soon the fire elemental with his head risen and locked onto her shared a look. The former barman rose a fiery hand and made a silent wave from afar. Sans returned it with a chuckle.

"heh. It's true we haven't talked in for a while. I actually miss them..."

Alphys observed him discreetly, trying not to let him notice that she was watching. While Sans was usually happy going about his work, and while she was not usually that good at reading people's expressions, her curiosity was just that much heightened when he was distracted by something and forgot everybody stood around him.
A wave of sadness rushed over his skull as he stared at his cell phone. No, not exactly sadness... Was it? It appeared that the one who had sent him this was someone he was attached to, at least to some degree, but according to his words, it was someone he had the chance to talk to in so long. He *missed* talking with.

He looked obviously conflicted, as if wondering whether he should answer or not. Did he want to interact with this iteration of his friend, or did he want to wait for someone so he could have this chat without it getting out of hand afterwards...?

After a few dozen seconds, the monster’s left hand started typing. Apparently he had made his mind.

[ FROM: Sans – 08:49 PM ]

*sure, it’d be nice to make up for lost time.*

*i’ll prolly see you some other day. maybe lunch*?

When he closed his cell phone and shove it back in his shorts’ pockets, Alphys judged it was the best time to carry on with the conversation. But all at once, she was not sure she actually wanted to talk about their former topic so much. There were matters that were just as important, that she believed she should tackle as soon as possible.

“So... What are your plans from now on?
she asked with a casual tone, but a stern intensity in her eyes and an anxious look. "You can't exactly work on your machine AND make sure she won't get in trouble at the same time, can you?"

"Heh. to be honest, I stopped counting the number of times she said she wanted to help, actually. not sure if I'll take her on that offer, but... she just seemed so... useful. 'sides, it'd be a nice way to keep an eye on her and work faster all at the same time.

She hummed, deep in thought yet paying much attention to his words and expressions. She looked skeptical yet slightly worried. If anything, the idea of a human offering to fix an intricate and potentially dangerous machine was making her feel extremely suspicious; yet the fact that he seemed to brush this suspicion off as if it should be considered irrelevant made her at least try to reconsider. He was usually so much more cautious than she was. at least he was handling his secrets much better than she did. That, or maybe he had just stopped caring about anything due to all these time loops... Until he didn't anymore. Was that making sense?

Sans's behavior during this last month had been... hard to say the least. For years they had grown used to him being nihilistic and careless, supposedly because of the time jump that could occur would erase everything...
time jump that could occur. Would everyone would do and none of them would even remember had happened.

Ironically... this used to be his behavior, until actually started recalling the time jumps; from point onwards, well, admittedly she had only been able to see the last iteration of it, but the change in him at the beginning of this loop and how he was behaving, ‘the day before’ was baffling.

From lazy and depressed, literally from one day to the other, he had become so desperate... This desperation led him to get on the move as soon as he had the dimmest glimmer of hope.

He had stopped caring... up to the point when that made him care again.

This was so... strange. And yet, this was the only way... he could explain it. Then again, what could she understand of him, from that pitifully shallow view of the events? Who knew how many timelines were squished between the first day of this loop and ‘the day before’? Who knew, maybe he had been trapped in loops for years, and this sudden change in behavior had not been nearly so sudden at all.

Speaking of time loops...

“I’m still wondering... What made you think that these ‘players’ would necessarily
that those... players would need to have the ability to time jump?"

Sans’s skull tilted in surprise, as if he had not expected she would ask. Had he forgotten to tell her? Maybe.

"well, that one’s easy." he chuckled and mindedly, looking in the distance and displaying a small smile. “she comes from a world where they hardly any magic at all. so, in order for their souls to be stable enough to sustain themselves, naturally need more determination to just survive.” He shrugged. “i made some measurements and all, and theoretically their souls should be around four times stronger than a human soul here. should be more than enough to do the job...

Alphys’s soul sank. The human Sans had brought times stronger than a regular one. Was he nuts...? But... the deed was done. There was no more getting it back now, no matter how much she thought this should be a wiser solution for now.

“I... T-that would explain it.” she sneaked her clawed fingers underneath her shirt and rubbing her closed eyes in tired circled motions.

“B-but Sans, do you just realize what bringing one here would...” She readjusted herself on her back, crossing her arms, and sighed.
glasses and sent him a scolding, yet terrified look. “S-she’s just a d-doomsday-enhanced ha-hazard, now!”

It didn’t help that he had slowly raised a pair of fox-like eyes, darkened pupils to face her. The *plainly aware* look giving her was all the more reassuring.

“i *know*. that’s why i really need you to help me here. no one can know, and *especially not* asgore. i don’t want to risk him if he got her and absorbed her soul along with the other six...” His eye-sockets twitched in an eerie, almost sinister manner, as if he were about to make a joke. “need more help here. *what’s above godliness*?”

Oh, you wouldn’t know.

The silence that engulfed them was only covered by the sounds of all the other monsters surrounding them, completely oblivious as ever. Alphys suddenly started to feel anxious about potential menaces, worried that any of them could have heard even one word of their talk...

Maybe Sans was right. She definitely should have tried to find a different setting, if they were to discuss something so dangerous.

That is, if there *were* anything else to discuss; judging by how Sans stood up from his seat and addressed her with one last glance before leaving, it seemed obvious that to
conversation was over. He was getting near a much crowded, much darker place; the perfect setting wanted to take a shortcut and disappear without noticing. Did he really intend to leave her like that after saying something like that?!

“S-Sans, wait!” she stumbled away from him and half walked, half trotted after him. Fortunately when he heard her, he stopped and turned around although he looked annoyed. When she stopped quickly catch her breath, she found that for seconds she had forgotten her words... So instead what she had probably meant to say at first blabbered: “Can I come with you?”

There was a pause. Then, Sans’s sockets so humorously, as if he weren’t sure he had heard right. “... what?”

She hesitated, having just realized what she had said. “I-I mean... You look like you haven’t some proper rest in a while. You must have had any time to come here before today so now that you can take some time for yourself, y-you’ll need someone else to look after her, so y-you can at least relax a bit...”

That much was true, at least. During the entire
it was obvious that he was completely absorbed in his project, to such extent that Sans, of all people, had to neglect his sleep. Well, it was not certain that he neglected his sleep, but now that she could see him first time in so long, it was at least obvious that he was a lot more tired than usual. And after that ache from earlier... No matter whether he was tired or not, definitely deserved his rest, if only for one evening.

After a few seconds of silence, the skeleton said, "you have thought through a similar argument, but I ended up smiling and shrugged jokingly.

"you know what? you’re right. i kinda miss my haven’t seen it during the last fourteen years, you realize that?"

She rolled her eyes teasingly. "Exactly what I was saying. If you keep going like that, you just MIGHT cure that laziness of you. Next step, you’re gonna make it sn.

Hotland."

For the first time, they laughed together, from a laugh. It did not last for long, but the feeling remained. When Sans stretched an open hand, Alphys gladly and they both disappeared, only to reappear in
room at the outskirts of Snowdin Town.

“So... Where is she now?” Alphys asked, turning her head around and looking for any trace of her. “Could be a living being in the house... And the realization hit her. “W-wait, y-you ACT left a human without supervision, your house, for...”

He leisurely glanced at the watch on his left hand. “... One hour twenty minutes. Could be worse...” He looked amused by the scientist’s terrified at his words. “What, you were worried she’d burn the house down while I was gone?” He fell silent for a few seconds when he took some time to look at his watch. “… Looks pretty clean, actually. Huh. Definitely as good as papyrus, but, not bad.”

The door behind them opened swiftly, as a brunette obliviously walked in, closed the door behind her, turned back towards the direction she intended to follow—and stopped in shock as she met face to face with not one, but two monsters, who each turned a surprised expression towards her.

When her stare crossed the human’s eyes, Alphys’s eyes widened in size. The human blinked while staring at her, seemingly confused. She tried to change her expression, trying to smile...
lizard again. She tried to show a patient smile and happily, but the monster stiffened and very obviously to refrain from stepping back. Upon seeing her, Dawn carefully stepped back to leave her some space. The scientist seemed to appreciate the gesture, as she at first, but eventually cracked a small and shy smile.

“... H-h-hiya. S-so you’re... t-the hero, right?” Well, duh.

The poor Alphys seemed to be completely petrified. When she tried to imagine what she must have been through during this timeline, the human easily understood where that came from. Why did Sans bring her here in the first place...? Dawn sent another glance at the boy, silently asking for his permission before she would make any move or raise her voice at all. She was met with absolute indifference; it wasn’t really that he didn’t give a care in the world, but rather that he was enjoying the view way too much to help her in any way.

“It... depends on w-which one you’re talking about,” she eventually answered, whispering in a calm and soft tone, trying to sound as reassuring as possible.

“D-do you know everything about...?” Wait, question. What if Sans had wanted to keep it a secret? Great way to bust it, really, congratula...
“...Y-yeah.” the lizard muttered, avoiding her but actively keeping an eye out for any movement. “I-I know ab-bout the video.”

Oh. This explained that. “I... see.”

If awkwardness could be tangible, one would have a full arsenal of blades in order to cut through the veil of uneasy embarrassment.

“she insisted on coming.” Sans shrugged, petting the lizard with a lazy thumb. Then, he continued towards the stairs, sending them a lazy wave with his left hand without looking at them. “you have fun. i’ll go catch some z’s.”

“Uh— S-Sans, wait...!” Alphys cowered a response to the human’s sudden outburst, but was ignored for the time being. When Sans gave Dawn a silent nod, asking her to tell him what had in mind, she quickly obliged: “I was just thinking... for tomorrow. What time did you plan to get up just that... I can put an alarm on my phone so you be ready whenever you want.”

The skeleton blinked in utter bafflement. She was taking the initiative in a lot of things.

“uh... i didn’t have any plans, but... how ’bout this? is that good?”
“Thirty? Is that good?”

“Sure!” she smiled, already typing on her odd rectangle again. “It’s okay if you change your mind, just wanted to get an idea.”

Alphys gave her a suspicious look, although she knew better than to hide her wariness.

“So you’re really going to assist him?”

She gave her a sheepish grin. “Technically, I didn’t say anything. But it’s really up to him. I’m here to help, but I totally understand if you don’t trust me.”

They looked up at Sans, who just shrugged in his usual “*i seriously couldn’t care less*” attitude. Then he said that he’d decide on the next day, and resignedly walked up the stairs.

“A—actually, Sans! I—I’ll help you to—work with the machine. Tomorrow.” Alphys stuttered. “The CORE’s been fixed, so, t—the engineers s—should be fine without you. I’ll just send them a message tomorrow. A—Asgore will probably be happy if I say I’ll be working with you.”

There was a long silence. The human looked at her, surprised, but she also appeared somewhat nervous. Surely she knew enough to realize that an actual
Surely she knew enough to realize that an actual was a lot more competent to assist him; that, or she thought that three pairs of hands would be more than only one or two. But then again, the final only fell on Sans, also known as the most inde, who would be ready to refrain from giving his de could cause some mild yet hilarious annoyance, it could not be responsible for any *actually uni* consequences. That troll.

In the end... He just shrugged. Again.

“*Sure. g’night.*”

He really was doing that on purpose. This last time were to ask him something, when Alphys stopped, he was on the verge of opening the door lead bedroom, part of her only did it to annoy him in

“*H-hey, Sans. I know you want to some peace now, but just before y that, d-didn’t you forget someth* Sans grudgingly sighed before turning a pair of but glaring eye-sockets towards her. “*I th you’d taken a second ration for he* He shook his skull as if what he had just heard was but a nonsensical and utterly stupid waste of time. He merely said:

“*In the kitchen.*”
Sans’s shortcut to the Hotland lab facilities was, as usual, executed without a hitch. He perked a few wary glances left and right out of habit before getting out of the shadows, then casually made his way to the front door and inside the main building. A button was pressed, and he patiently waited for the elevator down to the basement.

Until the main door opened again and someone leisurely walked in his direction.

“Oh. Howdy, Sans! Long time no see.”

He froze in place, mentally cursing his luck. This voice…

When he had told the human that she would have to wait for an hour and a half at most, it was definitely not because he had actually meant to stay for that long. He had just preferred telling her that she would have to wait rather than having her worry or expect him to come back too soon; nothing more.

He had planned to just get in, grab the grub, and then get out before anyone truly had the time to notice he had ever been there. Or, well, he wanted to get to be seen by just enough monsters to let them notice his presence, but not enough to meet someone he actually knew and get stuck in an awkward conversation for who knew how long.
So, of course, of all the monsters he could have been greeted with, it just had to be him.

Sans inhaled swiftly and nervously, then turned around and raised his skull as far up as his spine could allow him. Here stood Asgore.

“oh, uh… h-heya. y-your majesty?” He started giving a small wave. Then he stared at his hand, wondering if that was respectful enough or if he was supposed to follow some sort of protocol that he did not know about. “i just, uh… went for the gru… i mean dinner, y’know. heh eh.”

The Boss Monster gave a deep, but genuine laugh upon seeing the skeleton’s nervousness.

“Of course you did.” he muttered jokingly, bending forward slightly and letting an amused yet desperately morose spark glimmer in his eyes. “You of all monsters deserve a break every now and then.”

“heh, yeah, i do kinda enjoy taking it easy and all that, from time to time…” Someone just get him out of this. Please.

Sweet mercy, the elevator behind him rang and opened its mechanical doors, distracting the taller monster from him, if only for an instant. Asgore was not the kind of person to be bothered by these slip-ups and occasional misbehaviors, but if only because he was a member of the royalty, it was just hard to know how to properly speak to him; especially in the timeline they were currently in.

Asgore gently gestured him to enter first, so he did, and he was followed silently. Sans pressed the button to lead them in the basement, then buried his hands in his pockets.

This… was fine.

He was just stuck in a small elevator making some small talk with the king of the Underground and all the monsters who survived after the murderous rampage of what had appeared to be a human terrorizing an entire race, also known as the king who still had six human souls at his disposal, who had sworn to protect all his remaining subjects and was now fully resolved to absorb said six souls if any true danger were to come again, for example, a ninth human who would just happen to somehow magically appear out of nowhere and be in hiding in his house all the way back in Snowdin Town.

No big deal.
“What were you doing outside of the shelter?” Sans stiffened with just enough discretion so as to not let the other monster notice. There had been no suspicion in his voice; rather, just a hint of concern, and maybe of confusion. But still, he just couldn’t help but feel on edge. “I still wonder why you preferred staying isolated like this while working on your project. It would have been safer for you to stay in the laboratory. Besides, you would have had access to all the materials and resources the other scientists have at their disposal...”

Even though Sans knew a little bit more about Asgore’s personal life than he should thanks to his adventures throughout time and memories of past alternate events, they had never been particularly close — especially since, well, it was hard to get close to a member of the royalty during his reign, even if this particular member was known for doing his best to stay as close as possible to his subjects.

Still. This Asgore… This was a version he had never truly been given the chance of getting to know at any other point during the past timelines, and this was a version he… really would have preferred not getting to know at all.

“Well, y-yeah, but… the machine’s been standing all the way back there for ages, so i just didn’t really feel like movin’ it around… you could say it’s kinda a… family heirloom. y’know. has some sentimental value an’ all that.”

This was an Asgore who loved his subjects more than anything else in the entire world, because they were literally the only thing left that he cared about. And after he felt like he had already failed them when Alphys had been unable to contact him in time about the “murderous human child” issue… This was an Asgore who had put his grief past him for real.

This was an Asgore who, after witnessing so much pain and horror coming from one single human child, had ultimately lost all lingering faith he had in humanity. If a child could be such a demon, what could the adults possibly be like?

“I... see. Yes. Of course it would.” Asgore glanced to the side, an obvious flow of melancholy and nostalgia stirring within. “Why did the humans that came down here always have to take so much from all of us...? I simply cannot understand.”

This was an Asgore who had lost hope, but who had gained the will to… get revenge, maybe? Not even that was certain. The plan was basically the same as before; except that contrary to the previous times when he had to deal with Frisk, this specific time, he really was willing to go through with it. Because if he didn’t, he would go through the risk of losing all he had left.
“oh, humans had nothing to do with his… uh, i mean, i-it’s got nothin’ to do with all that. it’s just that it’s, well, was, his greatest invention and all, so…”

He laughed nervously for a bit. Then he stopped.

Better to change the subject.

“what about you? you were…”

He had lost everything for the third time in his life. Each of the previous occurrences had left their own aching mark; but this last one… It had not even been done by an actual human at this point, technically speaking; but only Sans truly knew better. The others didn’t know that.

“I was looking after the souls, yes.” the King nodded slowly, yet sternly. “We cannot afford to leave them without supervision for too long. And even though we do have some volunteers to look after them at all times, I simply could not help but verify myself, after the blackout occurred.”

The elevator stopped. There was a ding. The doors opened.

Asgore exited first. Sans released a small sigh when he thought the other monster could not hear him, then he followed.

Had he been given even the illusion of a choice, he would have obviously chosen a more welcoming timeline before inviting his special guest around. But sadly, he was not exactly ready to pass up the opportunity he had been given, knowing full well how unlikely it would have been for him to be given a second chance. If he had been brought back to this point in time when he had first discovered everything, he knew he would have done it again.

Then again, now that he thought about it, maybe he should have warned the human about the real danger of her exposure and made sure she would stay put.

His entire body was stilled as he stared in the distance, pondering his options for the duration of exactly two seconds and a half. Then he shrugged. Internally.

... meh. she’ll be fine.
He’d probably just forget when he got back home, anyway. Or be too lazy to think about it. But that wouldn’t be a problem. She already knew the context and she knew so much already about pretty much everything there was to know in the first place: she should be clever enough to figure it out on her own and avoid getting herself in trouble.

As long as they were the only ones ever wandering around Snowdin or outside the laboratory, it would be unlikely for her to be discovered by someone else. They just needed to avoid the cameras, but then again, what use would they have for going so far into the wilderness?

“Oh, right! I almost forgot.” Asgore’s giant head tilted upwards in sudden realization, and the sound of his exclamation vigorously pulled the skeleton away from his thoughts. “You came just in time, actually. I was told that Alphys wanted to see you.”

Sans blinked in confusion. “did she, now…?”

“She did. Actually, I believe it was related to the power outage from earlier.” A gleam of genuine and somewhat childish joy sparked in the taller monster’s eyes before he continued, as if he had just made a hopeful deduction: “Does it mean that your project has advanced enough so you could start a few tests of some sort?”

Ugh. Touché. Not exactly what he had in mind, but… This hit way too close to the truth for his liking. And now he had better finish his time machine as fast as possible because if he took too long, the King of the Underground of all people could start to become suspicious. Just great.

“well i’m not done yet, but… you could say that the first half of what had to be done, is done. and…”

The skeleton paused, seemingly considering whether what he had in mind really was worth saying… But after thinking a little more about it, he decided that he could give himself that little bit of credit. He did just manage to make interdimensional travel real. That did probably deserve at least a little bit of praise.

Slightly despite him, but also because he gladly allowed it, his skull ended up smiling with a slight yet almost smug spark of pride.

“… well, yeah. guess i did make some real progress. for science.”
“I am very glad to hear this.” Asgore answered, a satisfied and happy smile spreading on his face. “Well… I will not keep you busy for any longer. I am certain that Alphys is looking for you right now. You should not be making her wait.”

The King promptly left him behind, advancing towards the first door on their left. Sans spent some time to recollect his thoughts and take a deep breath.

So. Alphys wanted to see him, because of the power outage that he had caused during his interdimensional experimental shenanigans. There were so many possible ways it could go. Obviously, he had no idea what she was about to tell him, it wasn’t like he could predict from a mile away how she would react after living through so many outcomes and having known the multiple aspects of her personality for who knew how long.

He rubbed the bridge of his nonexistent nose between two bony fingers, grumbling under his breath in apprehension.

Better to just get this over with. Chances were, if he didn’t come to her, she would find a way to make it to Snowdin all by herself, and if that happened, she would not be happy.

Still. Grub first.

As soon as he opened the door leading to the main lobby, which had been reorganized to serve its new purpose as a dining room and cafeteria of sorts, the noise and large crowd overwhelmed him.

Compared to how many monsters lived in the Underground overall, there were never that many of them left after a run where the kid had been so murderous; but even then, the Hotland Laboratories’ basement was definitely not spacious enough to actually host all of them for so long.

Nonetheless, while the majority of the survivors were gradually relocated in New Home just a few days after the kid was neutralized, they were still always meeting in the Laboratory whenever they needed something. Supplies. Clothes. Food. Announcements from the King.

The laboratory had become the most important hub for pretty much everything. It was the safest place in the whole Underground, the Capitol being a close second thanks to its improved security infrastructures, which had been built in a rush after Frisk’s journey, but were largely strong enough to stand as impressive fortifications for the city. Still, even though they were not technically living there, the laboratory felt safer for a majority of monsters, and since it had turned into the largest public storeroom in the Underground, this was bound to gather the most people given how scared they had been of venturing outside or losing any more than they already had. It took more than two weeks before the first team of the most combat-experienced monsters came out and explored what had become of the Underground, carefully monitored by the security cameras.
Sans quietly joined the line for the food rations, carefully crafting his strategy.

He despised the mere idea of actually going through with what he was about to do, but then again, as long as he didn’t get caught doing it and as long as he had planned to change this timeline for the better anyway, in the grand scheme of things, it wouldn’t really matter.

Besides, it was not like he truly had a choice; even under the most regular circumstances, asking for two rations would have raised quite a handful of eyebrows. The idea of being completely straightforward and casually asking for a second ration because he needed to feed a human in hiding made him laugh internally, but for the sake of the safety of said human and of the entirety of his plan, he just couldn’t be that blunt.

Among the monsters responsible for preparing enough food for everyone, as usual he recognized the bunny shopkeepers from Snowdin Town, that ‘Burgerpants’ guy (he’ll get his real name eventually), and some others he didn’t personally know, but whose faces he had seen a few times before every now and then. He carefully observed the group, the line of the other monsters around him who were, just like him, waiting for their own dinner, and the displays of packed food rations that were stocked all the way in the back of the room, vastly out of reach from everyone in the line and the least supervised of all due to their alleged inaccessibility.

As soon as he saw an open window in time and space where he could exploit a blind spot, he discreetly stretched an arm in what would be commonly considered a vastly unconventional direction, and as swiftly as he could without making any noise, let alone letting anyone suspect that anything was happening, he grabbed a sandwich that was waiting a few dozen feet away from his current position, then retracted his arm the other way through the shortcut and carefully hid his prize in one of his hoodie’s inner pockets. He threw a few worried glances around him out of paranoia, but nobody seemed to have noticed. Good. Now all he had to do was wait for his turn and ask for his own ration, and everything would be fine.

Once finally he was out of the line with one ration in his hand and the other still carefully hidden in his closed jacket, he glanced at his watch and noticed that he had already spent forty whole minutes in that mess. Ugh. Couldn’t he just find a shadowed corner and warp his way back to Snowdin while no one was looking? He’d just pretend he couldn’t find Alphys. He had spent much longer than he had wanted to already, so…

“A-hem.”

Oh God damn it.

Well, at least now he did not need to worry anymore about whether or not he should bother to actually look for the lizard scientist, since she had very obviously found him first. Still, was the entire universe playing a trick on him today? It looked like awfully unlikely coincidences had kept piling up all day long, and that was starting to really rub him the wrong way.
“You weren’t actually going to leave without even saying hi again, especially not after what coincidentally happened to the CORE after it received some unusual energy spike coming from its Snowdin distribution plant, were you?”

… Welp. No more escaping it, now. After conjuring almost all of his remaining energy into stopping himself from face-palming or sighing too loudly due to his weariness and frustration, the skeleton turned around and prepared a casual, yet too little too obviously fake smile.

“… hey, al. how’s it going?”

He knew in all honesty that just pretending that he didn’t know what was wrong and that everything would turn out fine was stupid and counterproductive, but then again, he simply had no idea how else to handle the situation, and he was too exhausted to care. He really just wanted to get this over with and find his way out of here as soon as he could seize his chance.

“I don’t know, Sans.” She rolled her eyes and shrugged in a mixture between amusement and annoyance, as she very obviously mimicked his own teasing attitude. “What do you call a guy who leaves the CORE barely standing after he ran some tests with his creepy quantum physics time-space altering biz, and who doesn’t even show up afterwards to help or apologize, leaving me all alone to fix his mess?”

… Yeeeeeah, she was pissed. Rebooting the entire facility and recalibrating each of its features individually, all of this pretty much all on her own, had to have been a huge pain.

“uh…” Was she expecting him to actually answer, or…? Eventually, he just displayed a guilty apologetic grin and muttered the most obvious answer he could think of: “… a numbskull?”

“A quarky boronic bosonhead who bariumly gives a spin about others’ sulfuring and could’ve at lithium sent me a sine before starting his tests instead of having it all lepton me to fix all he hadron,” she paused just for long enough to breathe, “AND deal with the scared and angry monsters who had no idea what that was all about and never asked for any of this to happen in the first place.”

… Sans was, to put it bluntly, genuinely floored. He might have stared at her with wide eye-sockets for a good dozen seconds of stunned silence. Did he just get owned?

Not waiting for his answer, she gave him a silent sign by pointing the dinner tables all the way
back in the main lobby, and he followed without giving it much thought when he realized that he would much rather continue this discussion while sitting. He would have preferred talking in a more private and quiet setting, but apparently he didn’t have a say in that one.

“… ok, wow. good job on that one. it was actually impressive coming from you.” And he completely meant it, at that.

“Thanks! It took me a whole hour to come up with it.”

They reached one of the few free tables and took their seat. She actually looked sincerely grateful for that compliment, which astounded him and left him for a few seconds curious as to whether she wanted to scold him or just joke with him. Almost *hopeful*, even.

When her sarcastic tone came back though, sadly the former option became the obvious one:

“They reached one of the few free tables and took their seat. She actually looked sincerely grateful for that compliment, which astounded him and left him for a few seconds curious as to whether she wanted to scold him or just joke with him. Almost *hopeful*, even.

When her sarcastic tone came back though, sadly the former option became the obvious one:

“Then again, you gave me all the time to think on it, when I was stuck in front of the main generator and could do nothing but wait for it to cool down to a level that WOULDN’T risk making the entire Hotlands explode along with it if I gave it even one more task.”

He tried to turn a few sentences in his head in order to find a correct but not-*too*-obviously standard apology, but he seemed to fail miserably. Then again, maybe he was just too lazy or too tired, and maybe he did not actually care that much about apologizing in the first place.

Well, he had never caused that much damage to the CORE before, had he? This scene was supposed to be entirely new. But then again… Alphys’s scolding tended to always follow the same pattern. Even if she hadn’t even started yet, part of him already knew how it would go if he didn’t do anything to intentionally twist things to force them to follow a different path, and this part of him made him feel… strangely numb.

Sans tried to remember some old memories from the years when they still had some good times together. Since when had she become so predictable and dull…?

Seeing his prolonged silence, Alphys eventually just removed her glasses with one clawed hand and tiredly rubbed her face with the other.

“At least, PLEASE just tell me it worked.” she murmured weakly. “It looks like it did, but still…” Her look swiftly hardened. “Just so you know, I’m not gonna pretend I didn’t see you snatch that sandwich with that weird trick of yours.”
His bones rattled. Did she seriously consider telling on him…? “look, al, i really…”

She sighed again, her eyes dashing to the floor on her side as she appeared more conflicted; she seemed reluctant, but also relieved all at the same time, somehow? “… I know. A’s gonna need it, right?”

Very subtle, Alphys.

Sans threw multiple terrified glances around them, but when he was convinced that no monster around them seemed to have heard her (she had thought of lowering her tone, at least), he took a second to sigh in relief before he sent her a death glare.

“ok, what was that one for? you really want us to get caught or what?” It took him some extra energy to stay intimidating while whispering these questions so that nobody else could accidentally eavesdrop.

The conflicted frown on her muzzle shook and distorted itself in a funny way. She tried to readjust her glasses back in place, but they shook a little before they regained their balance. “I… I don’t know. I’m sorry, I just… D-do we r-really need to keep that a s-secret from EVERYONE?”

His shoulders rattled slightly as he tensed even more. If her stuttering was back, then it could only mean that she cared deeply about that issue.

It was surprising at first to hear this confession coming from the very monster who had been keeping somewhat similar secrets for years. Almost… funnily ironic. Part of him almost wanted to make a joke from it, but he stopped himself from doing so at the last moment.

Maybe he shouldn’t point it out.

Maybe she, too, was tired of keeping secrets, after all.

He could understand that feeling.

“depends. you think you could tell them what really happened last month? that whatever happened, it doesn’t even matter at all?”

The answer was obvious. Yet, she found herself unable to say it. What was preventing them from telling everyone that instead of an actual human, the thing that had caused them so much pain and
disaster was nothing more than a remote-controlled puppet? That the motive behind their misery was not even cruelty or madness, but just—the lack of knowledge from someone who thought they were playing a video game, and who genuinely believed that the lives they had stolen were not real?

What was stopping them from telling everyone that, chances were, the ones who had caused so much death and destruction were not so different from any of them? That just because they didn’t know any better… Had any monster been in their place, without knowing anything; would they have done the same thing without even realizing it?

Alphys thought of some of the most popular video games in the Underground. Not all of them were necessarily violent, but the monsters weren’t unfamiliar with this type of games either; she had even been asked to help create one of those Massively Multiplayer Online games, and although she wasn’t typically one to enjoy video games that much (she vastly preferred mangas and anime), she could understand the hype they created.

She thought back of how Undyne had sometimes spent some time on some of these video games, not only because she was using the excuse that she could use them as a means to create battle strategies, but also because she genuinely enjoyed them.

So now… How would she have reacted if, one day, she suddenly learned that one of these games actually impacted sentient people?

What was preventing them from telling everyone that they had been living the scenario of a video game? This sounded so easy to say. And all at the same time, this was such a painful revelation to receive. This was unbelievable not because it would seem scientifically absurd—way on the contrary, the theory that could explain how a video game could be controlling their world was so easy to understand. But this was unbelievable because nobody could easily accept that this could ever be the truth.

Such fact could be received with so many reactions, from anger to hopelessness. Especially after what had happened during the last month… Learning such truth could destroy so much. She knew it had had this effect on her.

Papyrus, Undyne, Mettaton, everyone…

They had all fought to their deaths. But all their inspiring, yet tragic heroism, had been for nothing.

Because there never was an ‘enemy’ in the first place.

Because this game could have restarted and erased all of their pain and memories at any point.

Because Sans’s plan involved doing exactly that.

Erasing everything, one last time.
“It doesn’t even matter at all.” What a terrible thing to say. What a horrible truth to keep.

She looked down. Sans was about to add something along the lines of “yeah, thought so.”, but he eventually decided against it.

“even you can’t accept it. not after what happened.” he muttered with a seemingly detached tone, but a compassionate look. “can you…?”

“I… I-I want to trust you. A-and I saw e-evidence that… t-they really d-don’t…” She cut herself short, trying to regain her composure. When she raised her eyes again to face him, they appeared so empty, yet paradoxically filled with a spark of undecipherable nature. “T-they r-really n-never want- ted this t-to h-happen. D-did they…?”

She looked about to cry. His shining pupils dimmed ever so slightly as they ran away from this disheartening view.

“don’t think dawn can speak for all of them, but… at least she understood the situation fast enough. judging by her expression, she’s…” He hesitated, trying to find the right words. How could he describe her? He hadn’t really known her for nearly long enough to judge her properly. “… well. she’s a person. that’s all there is to say. she’s a person with feelings, and a minimum of common sense. so she gets to understand how we feel, too.”

“Dawn… T-that’s her name, huh.” she caught on, repressing a stiff giggle. “How did she take the whole thing?”

“she, uh. well, it took her a while to just… believe it was happenin for real.” When he thought back of the first conversation he had with her, he chuckled for a bit. “you should’ve seen it. pretty funny in retrospect.”

Alphys’s muzzle shook a bit as she tried to laugh along, but the sad expression won over immediately. After a few seconds, the desperate look was replaced with a harsh frown.

“I just really hope you’ll keep that one under your watch.” she muttered edgily. “The other one caused enough pain as it was.”
The death glare she received from Sans made her shiver uncontrollably.

“Frisk would never have done any of this.”

The lizard gave him a dirty look. Even though she had been told that they weren’t actually responsible for what had happened, and that they weren’t even the one responsible for trapping their world in endless time loops… Part of her was still surprised that Sans would even keep calling that human by name despite everything that had happened because of them.

Maybe Sans had been able to forgive all of these humans, whether they came from their world or whether they were one of those ‘players’, but she knew for a fact that it couldn’t have been such an easy task for anyone else.

*She* knew the truth, and she was still struggling to forgive any of them. She *wanted* to, but the scars were still too fresh, and… She just didn’t feel ready to disregard her dearest friends’ deaths just yet. They had done so much… all in vain? How *could* she accept that? How *could* anyone accept that?

Part of her reasoned that the only reason Sans had been able to forgive everyone so easily was because he had been through so many timelines himself… Maybe he had simply stopped caring altogether. It is so much easier to forgive if you weren’t hurt in the first place.

Ever since she learned that he had been able to keep track of the time jumps sometime during the last month, Sans had always refused to tell her how many timelines he had been through, or what he had seen during those erased times. The only thing she knew was that at some point, they had made it all to the Surface, and that Sans’s plan involved replaying that timeline once more, at the very end.

*Replaying it.* As if it were just an act. A play he had learned to rehearse over and over, to the point where he had learned his part by heart and could do it in front of an audience without ever stuttering or having to actively work on his memory to remember his lines.

Or, under a different angle, maybe he simply saw it as an experiment whose results had become entirely predictable. Take those reactants, choose carefully the conditions of the reaction’s environment, and you will always obtain the same products with a complete certainty. After the stage of experiments, science always tries to make predictions, after all.

He had seen them all, repeating every day the same lines like a bunch of broken records, merely because they could not remember the other timelines like he did. He must be so tired of hearing the same ‘dialogue’ all over again… Maybe this very conversation they were having right now… How many times had he lived through it already?
He had seen them all die, only to come back to life a few hours later, over and over… Did he still feel anything when he saw one of them fall to that human? Did he still feel *anything at all* towards them, at this point…?

They were his family and friends, and she could tell that he still *wanted* to feel that way towards them, no matter what. But still, in the end of the day… Did he still care about them?

He had to care enough, or at least persuade himself that he cared, because of how hard he had worked on this project of his in order to save everyone. But then again… His plan involved restarting everything. His plan involved erasing this iteration. Erasing *them*. Erasing her.

Did he realize any of this? Probably not. Sometimes she felt selfish for thinking that he was the selfish one. He wanted to save them, after all. She was the one who thought that instead of saving *them*, he wanted to save a different iteration of them all.

Still, the facts were what they were. Sans probably saw things under a different perspective, but this was what it was: a *perspective*. Sans wanted to save all monsterkind; but in doing so, he was neglecting the ones who were still suffering around him, right at this very moment.

His plan involved denying that any of their pain had ever existed in the first place. It involved denying that Undyne had literally cheated death just to give everyone a chance to evacuate. It involved denying that Mettaton had willingly sacrificed himself for the sake of saving even more time. It involved denying that Papyrus had been willing to keep his purest views and put them to the ultimate test. It involved denying her own personal growth during this last month.

She did not want to go back to being the useless insecure nerd she used to be. She wanted to keep that confidence she had worked so hard to regain during this past month. She wanted to keep helping everyone, like she had always been expected to.

Of course she wanted to save everyone and see them all happy on the Surface. But… she wanted to be the one to live through it. Was that selfish? Was that being scared of death? Not death, technically. The time jump would not ‘kill’ her. It would just erase her memories and send her back to how she was one month earlier.

But… she really didn’t like who she was one month earlier. She had changed so much… She had started to wonder if the Alphys from last month was the same Alphys as she was now.

This was when she had realized…

Even though Sans genuinely cared about everyone, he did not care about them. Even though Sans cared about her, he really didn’t care about *her, now*.

When she raised a tired look towards him, she had so many questions to ask, so many things to say… But she could not find the words.
Instead, she finally noticed that at some point during her zoning out, Sans had pulled his phone out of his pocket and started checking it. When she gave him a questioning look, he merely said that he had received a text:

[ FROM: Grillby — 08:47 PM ]
Hey Sans. First time seeing you here since the beginning of the month. We haven’t met in a while, have we? We should hang out sometime. The bar isn’t available for now, but working in your basement all day must be lonely. You look like you’re busy with the Royal Scientist so I won’t bother. Give me a sign whenever you want to chat.

The skeleton looked up in the crowd, and soon found the fire elemental with his head risen and locked on him. They shared a look. The former barman rose a fiery hand and made a silent wave from afar. Sans returned it with a light chuckle.

“heh. it’s true we haven’t talked in forever. i actually miss them…”

Alphys observed him discreetly, trying not to let him notice that she was watching. While Sans was usually hard to read, and while she was not usually that good at studying people’s expressions, her curiosity was just that strong, and he tended to drop his mask much more easily when he was distracted by something and forgot everything that stood around him.

A wave of sadness rushed over his skull as he stared back at his cell phone. No, not exactly sadness… Was it nostalgia? It appeared that the one who had sent him this message was someone he was attached to, at least to some extent… but according to his words, it was someone he had not had the chance to talk to in so long. He missed talking with them.

He looked obviously conflicted, as if wondering whether he should answer or not. Did he want to interact with this iteration of his friend, or did he want to wait for the next one so he could have this chat without it getting erased afterwards…?

After a few dozen seconds, the monster’s left bony thumb started typing. Apparently he had made his mind.

[ FROM: Sans — 08:49 PM ]
sure, it’d be nice to make up for lost time. i’ll prolly see you some other day. maybe lunch.

When he closed his cell phone and shove it back in one of his shorts’ pockets, Alphys judged it was the best moment to carry on with the conversation. But all at the same time… She was not sure she actually wanted to discuss about their former topic so much. There were different matters that were just as important, that she believed they should tackle as soon as possible.
“So… What are your plans from now on?” she asked with a casual tone, but a stern intent and an anxious look. “You can’t exactly work on your machine AND make sure she won’t get in trouble at the same time, can you?”

“heh. to be honest, i stopped counting the times she said she wanted to help, actually. not sure yet if i’ll take her on that offer, but… she just might be useful. ‘sides, it’d be a nice way to keep an eye on her and work faster all at the same time.”

She hummed, deep in thought yet paying much attention to his words and expressions. She looked skeptical and worried. If anything, the idea of a human offering to help fix an intricate and potentially dangerous machine made her feel extremely suspicious; yet the fact that Sans seemed to brush this suspicion off as if it should be entirely irrelevant made her at least try to reconsider.

He was usually so much more cautious than she was… or at least he was handling his secrets much better than she did. That, or maybe he had just stopped caring altogether due to all these time loops… Until he didn’t anymore.

Was that making sense?

Sans’s behavior during this last month had been… puzzling, to say the least. For years they had grown used to seeing him nihilistic and careless, supposedly because of how any time jump that could occur would erase everything they would do and none of them would even remember what had happened.

Ironically… this used to be his behavior, until he had actually started remembering the time jumps; from that point onwards, well, admittedly she had only been able to see the last iteration of it, but the change in him between the beginning of this loop and how he was behaving just ‘the day before’ was baffling.

From lazy and depressed, literally from one day to the other, he had become so desperate… This desperation had led him to get on the move as soon as he had found the dimmest glimmer of hope.

He had stopped caring… up to the point when the events made him care again.

This was so… strange. And yet, this was the only way she could explain it. Then again, what could she hope to understand of him, from that pitifully shallow view she had of the events? Who knew how many timelines had been squished between the first day of this loop and ‘the day before’? Who knew, maybe he had been trapped in time loops for years, and this sudden change in behavior had not been nearly so sudden at all.

Speaking of time loops…

“I’m still wondering… What made you think that these… ‘players’ would necessarily have the ability to time jump?”
Sans’s skull tilted in surprise, as if he had not expected that she would ask. Had he forgotten to tell her? Maybe he had.

“Well, that one’s easy,” he chuckled absent-mindedly, looking in the distance and displaying a small smile. “She comes from a world where there’s hardly any magic at all. So, in order for their souls to be stable enough to sustain themselves… they naturally need more determination to just, well, survive.” He shrugged. “I made some measurements and all, and theoretically their souls should be around four times stronger than a human soul from here. Should be more than enough to do the trick.”

Alphys’s soul sank. The human Sans had brought was four times stronger than a regular one. Was he nuts…?!

But… the deed was done. There was no more going back now, no matter how much she thought this should be the wiser solution for now.

“I… T-that would explain it.” She sighed, sneaking her clawed fingers underneath her glasses and rubbing her closed eyes in tired circled motions. “B-but Sans, do you just realize w-what bringing one here would…” She readjusted her glasses and sent him a scolding, yet terrified look. “S-she’s just a d-doomsday-enhancing ha-hazard, now!”

It didn’t help that he had slowly raised a pair of fully darkened pupils to face her. The plainly aware look he was giving her was all the more reassuring.

“I know. That’s why I really need you to hush it. No one can know, and especially not Asgore. I mean, if he got her and absorbed her soul along with the other six…” His eye-sockets twitched in an eerie way, as if he were about to make a joke. “Need a little help here. What’s above godliness?”

Oh, you wouldn’t know.

The silence that engulfed them was only covered by the sounds of all the other monsters surrounding them, oblivious as ever. Alphys suddenly started to feel them as potential menaces, worried that any of them could have heard even one word of their talk…

Maybe Sans was right. She definitely should have tried to find a different setting, if they were to discuss something so dangerous.

That is, if there were anything else to discuss; judging from how Sans stood up from his seat and addressed her a short glance before leaving, it seemed obvious that to him, the conversation was
over. He was getting near a much less crowded, much darker place; the perfect setting if he wanted to take a shortcut and disappear without anyone noticing. Did he really intend to leave her like this, right after saying something like *that*?!

“S-Sans, wait!” she stumbled away from her seat and half walked, half trotted after him. Fortunately, when he heard her, he stopped and turned around, although he looked annoyed. When she stopped to quickly catch her breath, she found that for a few seconds she had forgotten her words… So instead of what she had probably meant to say at first, she blabbered: “Can I come with you?”

There was a pause. Then, Sans’s sockets squinted humorously, as if he weren’t sure he had heard her right. “… what?”

She hesitated, having just realized what she had said. “I-I mean… You look like you haven’t had some proper rest in a while. You barely had any time to come here before today! So now that you can take some time for yourself, y-you’ll need someone else to look after her, so y-you can at least relax a bit…”

That much was true, at least. During the entire month, Sans had been so reclusive and absorbed in his thoughts; it was obvious that he was completely absorbed in his project, to such extent that *Sans*, of all people, had started to neglect his sleep. Well, it was not *certain* that he had neglected his sleep, but now that she could see him for the first time in so long, it was at least obvious that he looked a lot more tired than usual. And after that achievement from earlier… No matter whether he was tired or not, he definitely deserved his rest, if only for one evening.

After a few seconds of silence, the skeleton seemed to have thought through a similar argument, because he ended up smiling and shrugged jokingly.

“you know what? you’re right. i kinda miss my bed. haven’t seen it during the last fourteen hours, you realize that?”

She rolled her eyes teasingly. “Exactly what I’m saying. If you keep going like that, you just MIGHT cure that laziness of yours. Next step, you’re gonna make it snow in Hotland.”

For the first time, they laughed together, from a genuine laugh. It did not last for long, but the feeling remained. When Sans stretched an open hand, Alphys gladly seized it, and they both disappeared, only to reappear in a lit living room at the outskirts of Snowdin Town.

“So… Where is she now?” Alphys asked, turning her head around and looking for any trace of
what could be a living being in the house… And then, the realization hit her. “W-wait, y-you ACTUALLY left a human without supervision, i-in your house, for…”

He leisurely glanced at the watch on his left wrist. “… one hour twenty minutes. could be worse.” Sans looked amused by the scientist’s terrified attitude. “what, you were worried she’d burn the house down while i was gone?” He fell silent for a few short seconds when he took some time to look around. “… looks pretty clean, actually. huh. definitely not as good as papyrus, but, not bad.”

The door behind them opened swiftly, as a humming brunette obliviously walked in, closed the door behind her path, turned back towards the direction she intended to follow—and stopped in shock as she met face to face with not one, but two monsters, who each turned around to face her with a pair of surprised expressions.

When her stare crossed the human’s, Alphys’s eyes tripled in size. The human blinked while staring at her, sent a quick interrogative look at Sans, then went back to stare at the lizard again. She tried to show a patient smile and greet her happily, but the monster stiffened and very obviously tried to refrain from stepping back. Upon seeing her unease, Dawn carefully stepped back to leave her some space. The scientist seemed to appreciate the gesture, as she trembled at first, but eventually cracked a small and shy smile.

“… H-h-hiya. S-so you’re… t-the human, right?” Well, duh.

The poor Alphys seemed to be completely petrified by her view. When she tried to imagine what she must have gone through during this timeline, the human easily understood where that came from. Why did Sans bring her here in the first place…? Dawn sent another glance at the skeleton, silently asking for his permission before she would make any move or raise her voice at all. She was met with an absolute indifference; it wasn’t really that he seemed to not give a care in the world, but rather that he was enjoying the view way too much to help her in any way. Jerk.

“It… depends on w-which one you’re talking about.” she eventually answered, whispering in a carefully soft tone, trying to sound as reassuring as possible. “D-do you know everything about…?” Wait, stupid question. What if Sans had wanted to keep that a secret? Great way to bust it, really, congratulations.

“… Y-yeah.” the lizard muttered, avoiding her look but actively keeping an eye out for any subtle movement. “I-I know ab-out the video game.”

Oh. This explained that. “I… see.”

If awkwardness could be tangible, one would have needed a full arsenal of blades in order to cut through this jungle of uneasy embarrassment.
“she insisted on coming.” Sans shrugged, pointing the lizard with a lazy thumb. Then, he casually walked towards the stairs, sending them a lazy wave with his left hand without looking at them. “you two have fun. i’ll go catch some z’s.”

“Uh— S-Sans, wait…!” Alphys cowered a bit in response to the human’s sudden outburst, but she was ignored for the time being. When Sans sent Dawn a silent nod, asking her to tell him what she had in mind, she quickly obliged: “I was just thinking, for tomorrow. What time did you plan to get up? It’s just that… I can put an alarm on my phone so I can be ready whenever you want.”

The skeleton blinked in utter bafflement. She sure was taking the initiative in a lot of things.

“uh… i didn’t have any plans, but… how ‘bout eight thirty? ’s that good?”

“Sure!” she smiled, already typing on her odd white rectangle again. “It’s okay if you change your mind, I just wanted to get an idea.”

Alphys gave her a suspicious look, although she tried to hide her wariness.

“So y-you’re really going to assist him?”

She gave her a sheepish grin. “Technically, he still didn’t say anything. But it’s really up to him. I’d love to help, but I totally understand if you don’t trust me.”

They looked up at Sans, who just shrugged with that “i seriously couldn’t care less” attitude. Then he merely said that he’d decide on the next day, and resumed his walk up the stairs.

“A-actually, Sans! I-I’ll help you too. W-with the machine. Tomorrow.” Alphys stuttered. “The CORE’s been fixed, so, t-the other engineers s-should be fine without me. I’ll just send them a message tomorrow morning. A-Asgore will probably be happy if I say I’ll be working with you.”

There was a long silence. The human looked at her with surprise, but she also appeared somewhat reassured. Surely she knew enough to realize that an actual scientist was a lot more competent to assist him; that, or she just thought that three pairs of hands would be more efficient than only one or two. But then again, the final decision only fell on Sans, also known as the most indecisive guy
who would be ready to refrain from giving his decision if it could cause some mild yet hilarious annoyance, as long as it could not be responsible for any actually unfortunate consequences.

In the end… He just shrugged. Again.

“sure. g’night.”

He really was doing that on purpose. This last time the girls were to ask him something, when Alphys stopped him as he was on the verge of opening the door leading to his bedroom, part of her only did it to annoy him in return.

“H-hey, Sans. I know you want to have some peace now, but just before you do that, d-didn’t you forget something?” Sans grudgingly sighed before turning a pair of silent but glaring eye-sockets towards her. “I thought you’d taken a second ration for her.”

He shook his skull as if what he had just heard was nothing but a nonsensical and utterly stupid waste of time.

He merely said:

“in the kitchen.”

And then he disappeared through his room’s door.

Curious, Alphys, who was the one closer to the room in question, opened the door leading to it and stared: right in front of her gaze, a packed sandwich was patiently waiting, obviously displayed in the middle of the table.

She face-palmed, sighing.

“… I hate it when he does that.”

Read via Screenshots Here (full formatting but may encounter loading issues)
“So... What were you doing outside?

It had only taken a split second after the appearance to notice that the hoodie she was wearing was not originally hers; and right after Sans had left, that the human in question had finally been revealed as the fact, as Alphys watched her remove it and blush in embarrassment.

She sort of acted like a scared child or animal at being caught doing something they knew they shouldn't have refrained from doing, as if she were surprised, but much, that she was now given The Stare in response to her misdeeds. This was the look of the cat witness owner come back home, and who watched with guiltily because the owner was blocking its only the cat was anticipating the moment the owner notice what exactly it had done with the curtain in the living room.

Alphys liked cats. She wished she could have one, she could only know of them from how they were in her favorite anime and other shows. From knew, these creatures were adorable, but sneaky, treacherous. And incredibly self-centered.
treačerous. And incredibly self-centered.

... Looks like they’re stuck on the awkward train

Honestly, it was beyond her how Sans had not even made the slightest remark about having her take some of his belongings without asking for his permission. Montana really did care that little about letting her do what she pleases. Part of her wanted to do the same, since she knew the context and kept trying to tell herself that this human was not supposed to be dangerous... But how could they know that for sure?

The human gave her a nervous and somewhat guilty look and then immediately went to put the jacket near the coat rack next to the entry door — probably the exact place where she had originally found it. Alphys tried to guard... But it seemed that what Sans had said really did apply. This human had some proper manners, at least.

“I finished cleaning about thirty minutes ago. I thought I’d just wait for Sans to come back. This place just feels too sad and weird when nobody’s there.” she finally answered, a shy and shy smile trembling on her face. Totally normal thing to do. “So I just borrowed a jacket and left a note on the TV in case he came back while I was gone. I just thought I’d go take a walk in a place where it feels normal to feel lonely.”
Alphys thought briefly of the places that could pull this description and wouldn’t have required a teleport in order to effectively reach them in a reasonable amount of time.

“You mean Waterfall?” she asked, lifting an amused eyebrow.

Dawn bit her bottom lip, averting the lizard’s eyes but soon nodding tensely. “Yeah. That was the plan at first, but then I realized it’d take much longer than I had planned, so... I turned around before I actually reached it.”

The reasoning was sound, and she looked perfectly honest, albeit a bit too shy for Alphys to completely dismiss the possibility that she might be hiding something. But judging from her general demeanor...

Yes, it still seemed more likely that this human were restraining her movements and carefully choosing her words because of a kind yet somewhat awkward appearance as harmless as possible in order to break the spell as much as she could, more than because of some ulterior motive that would truly be malice.

“This place is a lot bigger than I anticipated. If I would’ve loved to keep going at least until I reached the beginning of Waterfall, I always wondered...”
it’d look like in real life—it already looks gorgeous in the game... B-but I didn’t want Sans to be mad... I’m sure he’s already got a lot on his mind, and I’ve already been through so much... the last thing I want to do is bring him even more trouble.”

The human was not looking at anything anymore, and seemed to talk just for the sake of saying more. Maybe there was that hope that the more she told the story, the more she would manage to overcome the awkwardness of the situation. She was still being very careful with her words, because she wanted to be sure that she would not say something that would upset her or the other characters of that video game, or which might lead to her being discovered. She wanted to look as innocent and gentle as possible, so the right moment to attack was found. It looked more like the former, thankfully; but then again, exactly was the difference between the two? The language would be identical, since in both cases there was the same: make her interlocutor lower her guard.

“So it’s true. You really know everything there’s to know about this place? The scientist’s look hardened warily. “Every there is to know about us personal...
“W-well... Y-y-yeah. I’m... sorry?”

Ugh. Will you two just get this over with already?

The monster shook her head heavily without looking up, mumbling under her breath that there was no need to apologize about this sort of thing and that they just go to the kitchen because she should eat something and since they were about to have a long chat anyway, she preferred to have the possibility to sit down.

Dawn did not find anything to say in order to either object with her, so she merely followed her and took a seat on the opposite side of the table. The monster wasn’t feeling hungry enough yet, so the size of the sandwich intimidated her just a bit; however, the smell certainly made her want to at least give it a try.

Besides, hey! This was her chance to taste some food, wasn’t it? As it turned out, at least at first, it tasted mostly like regular food— only one real difference was noticeable. There was this slight tingling sensation in her mouth, almost like some small sparks of static electricity, even though it really was different than the hint of magic as her words made it sound like, way on the contrary. It was almost like a fifth taste that her body was not able to feel or interpret correctly, and due to her...
to feel this taste properly, her brain was simply not ready. Some kind of mystical impulse in order to grasp as best as it could.

*The taste of magic, probably. How stupid is that?*

The strangest part was when, as she swallowed, the entirety of what she had intuitively assumed to be solid matter... merely dissolve into thin air, sort of between her throat and her stomach. Oh well, people had actually been somewhat expecting this from being theorized by the fandom anyway.

When she raised her eyes and noticed that Alphy was there and watching her in complete silence, she thank her with a warm smile— but the scientist answered that Sans had been the one responsible for bringing it in the first place. Awkward.

“Do you... want some?” the human asked tentatively, handing the sandwich closer to her.

“I already had dinner. Thanks.”

... Welp. She really was not making it easy to have a constructive conversation, was she? Did she do something wrong? Was it because she was a human? Was it because she was a complete stranger but just so happened to know everyone already by heart? Was it because she was the ‘Anomaly’ she was?
for the Resets...?

Just do something to break the ice already, geeze... Admittedly, since Sans had forgiven her and all of the other players so easily... She had sort of assumed that she would either not know about the situation, or be more okay with it than he had been. If anyone else had the most rights to feel hurt and angry at them, it had to be Alphys, the fact that Alphys would give her the cold shoulder... She really had not expected anything like this...

Then again, if Alphys of all characters people would choose... It had to mean that she had been hurt. Even though she was not sure by what exactly, she had a list of guesses, and she certainly felt the need to amend to whatever pains she had unwillingly inflicted.

“L-look, I’m... I’m pretty sure saying that will mean nothing by now, but...” She inhaled sharply in order to increase her confidence and look more serious when she raised her grave eyes towards her. “I’m really sorry for what the game’s been doing to you. Whether in this timeline or in the other ones.”

“It’s okay.” she answered hastily, but she could not avoid her look. “I... I know you probably wouldn’t have done something like this if you knew. You wouldn’t have gone through with it, and...”
that extent, at least.”

“Everybody here is so sweet. Of course nobody in their right minds would want to wish pain or suffering on people like you.” Dawn murmured with a slight smile. “I’m glad Sans found a way to end it and give you a true happy ending.” She paused, but then added with a brighter smile: “All of you.”

“We... we’re not there yet.”

“Ha, ha... Sorry, you’re right. Sans said it’d take a few weeks before the machine’s ready.” And hope bloomed in her voice. The wait had to be unbearable.

How hard had it to feel like to be stuck in a Near-Future ending where everyone they cared about was lost, just so they could save them later...?

There was nothing to worry about because they’d succeed; but this was so unfair nonetheless... Sans and everyone, they had to miss everybody so much, and they still had to wait, only to be greeted with people they never acknowledge what they would have gone through to save them or even that they had been saved from a horror that nearly broke their hearts? Heck, she had never had the chance to meet them in person, and yet she missed them already.

“... I wish everyone could be here with us. I know it won’t even matter in the end because the Robot...
won’t even matter in the end because the rest bring them back, but I still wish they could be and well right now, and...”

The human let her last sentence linger on the tongue as, when she raised her bittersweet gaze the lizard, she lost both her nostalgic smile and her

“And what?” Alphys asked coldly, as her hair conflicted and shy look behind her glasses dare scold nothing but the floor. “That could’ve “befriended” them? This what you’re all interested in, isn’t To finally get to meet them too?”

Before the human could find the energy and move her lips in a coherent way, her eyes remained gawking at the view: the way Alphys was glaring daring to meet her eyes directly... A lot of words tried to describe it individually, without quite getting deepest intent. This glare was stern, but not at all hurtful, but not mean-spirited.

“I know this must be hard in your specific situation, but you need to get over it,” she added after just a split second, with a m tone that entirely fit with the meaning behind eyes. Mysterious and full of wonder... but ru

“You’re not the self-insert protag
from a cheesy fanfiction, so stop acting like it. We’re not prizes you get for completing “side-quests” in a game.

She gaped. “O-of course you’re not! I know real, now. And that’s exactly because of that...

“That’s it, huh...? Because we’re not pixels anymore, you want to take your chance and live your own adventure?”

The lizard wearily spat a morose, yet bitter, “Why do you want to help us so badly? Because you know us from the... Because we’re “celebrities” where we come from? Because if anyone believed in you when you’re back home, you’ll have to brag about it?”

“What— No!”

“Then why? If you’re so sure, then are you so interested in helping random strangers who basically just ripped from everything you’ve ever known, including your own universe?!” A loud outburst struck like thunderbolt. “If your reason is not because you’d “already known” from the video game, then I don’t know how long your naivety would...
lasted in the hands of any other crimi

“You— you’re not criminals!” the human offended and heart-struck.

“And what tells you that?!” she shouted.

“We’ve just met! You don’t know us!"

A long silence fell. When she felt her limbs start to tingle, Alphys realized that, in the heat of the moment, she had stood up in a jolt; yet, she decided to stay perfectly composed and watch: soon, she noticed exactly what kind of magic was hiding on the opposite side of the table.

Hiding, indeed. The human had left her seat and almost entirely made invisible due to her height difference, and behind the chair and the table, with just the tips of her fingers still daring to reach out, her head and the tips of her fingers still daring to reach out, the magic was still sticking out was probably out of nothingness, as the turmoil roaring in her eyes could be seen as a deluge of emotions, none of which could be read, but confidence or reassure her from the glowing thumb that was raging right in front of her.

Alphys slowly realized that she had let her magic escape. From a monster’s perspective, this kind of behavior was rarely ever considered to be something to be proud of. She was not sure whether this was a common trait in humans or if it was just an act of vanity.
reckoned with. In most cases, a monster’s inability to control their magic when overwhelmed by emotions was undeniable evidence of this monster’s inexperience when it came to actually handling their magic in a pre-calculated way; the fact that no real bullets were fired only proved Alphys’s lack of power and actual intent.

Still; seeing the look on the human’s face, one didn’t have to know much about her species’ culture to deduce that she definitely did not see this situation under the same perspective. Besides, Alphys knew the basics of biology and electricity’s effects on their body; she knew that her ridicule sparks could be truly harmful unless... to put her all into them, but she guessed it probably looked intimidating enough as they were.

The scientist immediately lost the scowl on her mouth, slowly went back to sitting at the kitchen table with her hands trembling. The air kept crackling with little white sparks for a few more seconds, but they soon died down as the curvy spines in the back of her head gradually went back to their usual position. She kept blinking for a few more times, until the electric color in her eyes went down as well.

“I... I’m sorry I lashed out like that. I had a long day.” she muttered apologetically.

“I’m sorry I scared you. I lost my temper.”
little, but, I’m not actually going to hurt you. I promise.”

The human waited for one more second, just to ensure everything had calmed down enough; but soon, she nodded, then slowly and shakily, but surely made back on her seat.

“I-I never thought you’d...” She shook her head immediately, nervously interrupting her sen “S-sorry, that’s not how I should put it... What I wanted to say was...” She stopped again; she turned a few words in her mind, but sadly, one conclusion could be drawn after she achieved a full minute of silence: “... There really isn’t a way I can make it sound like I wasn’t about to comment you with how you’re depicted in the game. I know.”

“It’s... It’s okay.” Alphys repeated once time, sighing. “I’m sure you can’t help it, especially if you’ve known the game a while. How long does it make for...”

“Oh, uh... I-it must’ve been a bit less than a year by now. I think.” Dawn took a short moment to reminisce the details. “I mean, I knew it existed before that, since my best friend kept telling about it until I gave in and asked her what...”
about. She’d even started chatting about it at any of all times. That’s just how determined she was. She paused to repress a little chuckle, muttering humorously for herself: “Ha. Determined.”

Alphys froze, then blinked in what appeared to be a mixture between shock and very slow, mind-inducing realization. “S-school...?”

Dawn rose a confused face with wide eyes. “Oh, I’m in high school. You... know what it is, right? Do you guys have a different education system?

“N-no, but, I just...” She fidgeted slightly. “H-h-how o-old are you...?”

The human stared blankly. “... Fifteen?”

This single word had the same effect as lightning. Muzzle trembled in an even more nervous way than to such extent that her glasses seemed to slide. She buried her head in her clawed hands, her head heavily resting on the table.

“... You’re just a teenager. You’re wearing stripes so I just assumed, Oh God. I’m talking existential crisis material with a kid. And I lashed out...”

... Apparently she had assumed that she was a than she really was. This fact confused Dawn even
than she really was. This fact confused Dawn even at first, because strangers sometimes mistook her for a twelve-year-old, but never for an adult. However, she soon remembered just how much monster knowledge humans in the first place—that was to say, hardly any. She would have expected Alphys to know the difference due to her watching so much anime, but then, maybe she just didn’t know how to compare very exaggerated drawings with their real life counterparts.

Part of her felt a little offended that the lizard woman looked at her a kid in the exact way she was saying it, but then she had to admit that this whole talk they had was, most part, flying over her head, or just giving her a headache. She could understand that Alphys was hurt because of the video game being real, but... what was that thing about “prizes” all about? She just wanted to know these guys better and have the option of potentially be their... Oh, that was it, wasn’t it? That thing about being famous, them just for... the pride of getting to know these magic ‘characters’ that everybody thought to be real but who eventually turned out to be real. The whole thing about saying that you knew a celebrity personally, time was running out. She wasn’t doing it for pride, was she? These guys were just fancying her, making it all real. They had their own lives. All she wanted was to...
Was she doing it for? If she had been kidnapped by other kinds of magical creatures like aliens she didn’t know or whom she would have known beforehand to be...would she have reacted the same way? Absolutely not...

... Maybe Alphys had a point.

“I... I was just surprised, don’t worry... It’s a-alright, you needed to get some stuff out of your chest. I’m sure it must’ve been hard for you to... leave you’re a video game character or whatever... some crazy stuff. I h-have no idea what it must be like for you... I-I’m sorry I made you feel that. Dawn murmured uneasily. “I-I think I’m starting to understand what you meant about acting like everyone and all, too... I c-can’t exactly help I wouldn’t want to make any promises, but I’ll best to... p-pretend I don’t know you? I-I’m not sure what I’m supposed to do actually, b-but...”

“You don’t have to do anything, I’m the one who lost it.” Alphys assured, shaking her vehemently. “I mean, you just got kidnap I guess I can’t completely blame you clinging to what you know of the... Of course you’d try to feel at home us so you’ll better cope with the s or something. I’m sure that if didn’t know anything about us or
place... You’d probably freak out for Magic and monsters don’t exist in the world, right? Sans told me so.”

The human lowered her eyes and absent-mindedly in the distance as if she could look past the table. Slow and heavy nod she soon made showed that fully listening.

“Truth be told, I... I guess I was projecting a bit. Y-you probably know that, I’m k-kinda the craziest monster and when it comes to getting fond of fictional stories and whatnot. So I learned about the game... Of course started making some wild fantasies thought about things like, h-how react if one day I was the one who kidnapped by the characters from favorite anime.”

The human nearly said “It’s Mew Mew: Kissy Cut by reflex, but fortunately managed to stop this from being uttered. Of course it was Mew Mew: Kissy Cut the game made it clear enough (although it was whether it was a dating simulation game or anime — both versions probably existed). Then use saying this out loud other than just increase awkwardness and making Alphys uncomfortable.
reason; other than by just being the stupid smoothest Captain Obvious that could ever be.

Alphys was not looking at her anymore, so she didn’t notice anything that had ever transpired through interlocutor’s head.

“I’m not exactly sure I would’ve handled things the way I should, either. But I got to think about it. So... I’m sure that thinking of your situation as just “getting the chance to meet game’s characters” is tempting and the most reassuring option you have... But you can— please just try to come this.” she muttered softly, but shyly uncomfortably. “I’ll repeat just one time... We’re not your prizes. We’ll be neighbors for some time.” Her look shifted as she cracked a small, bittersweet smile. “I must admit, part of me was actually excited to meet someone like you— I mean, so many questions about your world and that video game, I swear that you weren’t ready.”

A small, yet genuine and somewhat mischievous smile escaped her, and its honesty was contagious even...
escaped her, and its honesty was contagious enough. Soon, Dawn found herself laughing as well for an

“Anyway... I'd really like to be friend, eventually. It could be a lot of fun. But... I'd just really like that friendship could be because of something other than the game, you know... I mean... I guess I like to think I could make real friends all by myself, instead of because of my status... I don't know.”

When silence fell in the kitchen, Dawn was left to ponder a little more the lizard’s words; it seemed so, she was struggling to try and make some sense of it. She just knew that there were some hidden and concealed within the monster’s speech that could hint just how deeply she cared about that issue and would have bothered to speak for so long about it. But at least, she thought she easily had the gist of it could understand where that came from.

She wondered whether wanting to befriend someone literally met for the first time but grew to know intimately because you saw that person through and got to learn nearly everything about that was what being a creep or even a stalker was. It probably was. Even if she hadn’t done that or
because she was certain these people were fictitious, the result was the same.

“I... I don’t think I got everything you wanted me with this, but I’ll do my best to be careful,” she answered with a sheepish smile.

“It’s okay. I probably didn’t say the clearest way either. I’m still not sure how to say all of this anyway. I’m really just glad that you want to listen, at least.” Alphys dismissed it.

“You’ve probably had a lot on your shoulders, too, right?”

“Oh yeah, totally.” the teenager sighed in exhaustion. “I’m completely new to all this magic and sorcery, and now time travel and I’m still trying to wrap my head around a lot of things with you guys being more than just video game characters, and all at the same time I don’t want to be a burden to any of you because I know from the game how much you’ve all been through, but now I have to be and because acting like I know this stuff and wanting you guys as if I’ve known you for ages is making me feel uncomfortable, which is exactly what I want to avoid and why I wanted to just be nice and talk with you in the first place so you wouldn’t have to...”
with you in the first place so you wouldn’t have to deal with me bringing you guys trouble...” The referee gave another sigh, even longer and heavier than the previous one. She buried her head in her hands for a while, took some time to breathe, until she admitted, “… My head hurts.”

The scientist repressed a short, yet soft and warm expression as she watched the human with a satisfied and almost motherly look. Maybe more like the loving, protective big sister. In any case, it didn’t last for long because she soon stood up from her chair, opened a cupboard, took out a glass and went to the sink. When Daria was alerted by the sound of the running water, she was surprised to find that the height of the sink was completely out of the ordinary. Wasn’t there something in the game about the sink being insanely high so Papyrus could stack marshmallows in the cupboard below or something…? Oh who cares, she was too tired to play the ‘seven mistakes’ game. Maybe the sink was magic. Everything was magic here anyway.

Soon, Alphys handed her a glass full of cold water, with a joking, yet caring smile. The human thanked her, took it, and yet tiredly and took her time to empty it. Almost Instantly, the water evaporated as soon as she swallowed it, but at least it didn’t seem to have some relieving effect on her headache. Even the water counted as magic food. What the...
“... This place is weird.” she laughed incredulously. “It’s amazing, and I know I shouldn’t beExplorer anything less, but it’s weird. I have so many questions about everything.”

“Same here. Take your time.” the so called Jack said jokingly, nodding in a mockingly solemn wise gesture. “What aren’t you getting?”

“I’m just... not really sure? I mean, it looks so serious, I got kidnapped because the video game that in my world is affecting this one, and me being an Explorer can stop it. I really don’t know what else I should be getting from the situation apart from, well, this. But I don’t think that you guys need me to stay here for some time, until you’ve solved the problem once and for all. She blinked slowly, then inhaled sharply through her nose, pursing her lips tightly. “But all at the same time, a lot of this situation just... doesn’t make much sense to me.”

Alphys blinked blankly. “How so?”

“It’s probably ‘cause my best friend is a huge video game nerd and she’s always saying stuff like ‘time doesn’t exist’ or whatever, so with that and everything being a thing here... I guess I still need to adjust my mind being blown in more ways than just one.”
She took a small pause to let a small yet bright incredulous giggle escape her lips. “Right honestly, everything that happened sounds like sort of stuff that’d happen in a bad Shelby fanfiction or something. You even said it yourself.

As if taken by a sudden fateful doubt, or as if she had been stricken with the realization of just who she was saying this to, the human’s face suddenly fell as if an almost fearful look at what she very well knew, an otaku as well as an obsessive fanfiction writer, if rumors were to be trusted, was leaning towards cheesy romantic stories at best, the smut crackfics.

“Please don’t ship me with anyone I don’t know, or old anyone is here but I’m really just fifteen in my country it’s illegal.” The realization of what she had just said struck once more, and part of her was incredibly embarrassed and unclean for even merely thought of this possibility on her own. She had been reading too many of those fics herself and had been corrupted by the fandom, immediately face-palmed. “Uuugh, why did I say that.”

Dawn was pulled out of her thoughts when she repressed yet somewhat sly and mocking giggle.

“S-sorry, I didn’t mean to...” Alphys brought a small slightly trembling fist to the end of her thumb.
small slightly trembling fist to the end of her and forced a cough, avoiding her look. “T-really are that many fanfics in your w-Ones about... THIS happening, even?”

Call it whatever you like, I call it a show. A very sitcom for now, at that. I hope there’ll be at least action to spice things up at some point.

“Uhhh...” Okay, what was anyone supposed answer to that? This joke was getting slight meta for her own sanity and part of her was starting to consider the possibility, and the in the existential crisis it induced wasn’t pleasant to say the least. “... K-kinda? Well, usually most fanfics I’ve seen that turn around that sort of plot choose a... b-better setting. Like, you guess already on the surface or at least you’re all A-anyway most of the fanfics where Sans and does something productive, end up in him paired with someone, so, uh, I usually avoid those ones. And I promise I’m not saying this because you’re here.”

Alphys rolled her eyes jokingly. “Hey, don’t This is real life here, you’re safe that sort of weird fan fantasies.”

“Please don’t take this the wrong way, but som
the human retorted sarcastically, her eyebrows in an unamused expression smirking in a mixture between a joking interlude and pure disbelief. “No offense, but reality looks broken to me right now.”

The scientist exploded in loud laughs, and so did she. The concert lasted for at least a few minutes, until exhaustion had the better of them and they took over their respective needs for breathing.

“How did you two... handle the situation?” Alphys eventually asked.

“... I was stupid. I don’t think there’s any other word to put it.” the human muttered sheepishly. “One thing is, Sans thought at first that I was lying face down and being an evil manipulator or something while it was all really just a big misunderstanding. So... that was awkward. I’m just glad it’s solved.”

Alphys repressed a small laugh once more, but it was clear she had just laughed too much and they had run out of their laughing batteries.

“How... weird. Before I came here at first I felt bad for him as, like, a character, but...”
of what he’s going through and all, but then I got to see what the fandom did to him and how a deal he’d become, I g-guess I kinda started thinking, ‘Is he was... overrated?’ She marked a pause to look down and bit her lip shamefacedly. “N-now I know that it was all real, though... I-i really feel bad about thinking that.”

Oh good, when she was acting so docile I thought she was just going to be one of those mindless fangirls who do nothing but follow him around like a little puppy.

“He’s being so nice, and... hopeful?” She blinked in confusion. “I really just want him to succeed, you know? He deserves to reach that happy ending and then live in peace for the rest of his life, the poor guy.” She suddenly stopped her train of thoughts and turned her head when she saw the peculiar look on Alphys’ face.

“... What? Did I say something wrong?”

Wait. That wasn’t the “You said something, and now my SOUL is broken due to existential crisis” look. That was a smug

“Oh no, it’s not what you said. Just... he showed me your internet time when he was trying to tell me the video game.”

Down’s eyes widened in shock, and her voice turned high-pitched as she stammered, “I-I don’t know what you’re talking about!”
Dawn’s eyes widened in shock and horror. “You guys saw... the fandom?”

“Not much, sadly.” Alphys muttered dejectedly. “Sans wanted to convince me that he wasn’t just pulling my leg with his story of time travels and video stuff, so eventually he just turned his machine, connected his computer to one of your browsers, told me to search for the word ‘Undertale’ and said it’d give me all the answers I needed.”

“Oh... ouch. He didn’t even try to be tactful with that.”

“I really was annoying him and probably thought I was wasting his time by this point.” she shrugged and rolled her eyes jokingly. “Anyway, uh, long story short, let’s say he forgot to tell me ‘Undertale’ was actually spelled.”

Dawn looked like she was about to fall off her chair; her eyes would just pop out and fly into the ceiling like a pair of helium balloons.

“That’s how I was convinced.” she chuckled awkwardly. “I mean, I think we all knew that he couldn’t have made stuff up if he wanted to.”
This was a nightmare. The poor guys. The poor, poor tortured souls, you know, the internet and the naivety and innocence of blissful monsters who did nothing wrong and can't see their way from their cocoon of virtual reality without anything of humanity’s darkest side. Tainted forever by the merciless desires of a lusting fandom.

“You should have seen him.” Alphys’s voice was becoming harder and harder to repress. She was reminiscing. “He looked ready to die the entire thing. Pretty sure the reason he didn’t was because he needed it to save the universe or whatever instead of just grabbed the power button and pulled it out. I kinda wanted to stay the safer part of what you guys could have been working on, but Sans forced me to leave and asked me to never touch that machine again.”

There were no words. Dawn felt so sorry and so helpless at the same time so powerless.

“He looks tough and all, but he can get flustered way too easily.” she shook her head again. “Anyway... I’ve been having little suspicion for a while, and you said about him only brought
you said about him only brought more... constidence to this headcanon.

“What... exactly do you mean by that?”

“Hmm. How would you feel if I told you that even if he’ll never admit it loud and just pretend he’s fine always, he’s way too shy to look up any of the fandom stuff?”

“I’d... be relieved? Honestly, I totally understand on that part. That must’ve been horrible.” Her eyes winced overdramatically. “I’m actually happy that he won’t try to look for even more of that stuff. I know what he’s seen but he’s definitely seen enough to scar him... I REALLY don’t know how he’d be knowing what the fandom has done with him.”

At first, upon listening to her small rant, Alphys gave a brief sheepish look, probably feeling somewhat bad about her friend. But when the last words fell into silence, she paused—and, very gradually, an evil Grinch-like grin crept its way up on her muzzle as she slowly turned towards the human, sending her a demonic look, playing with her nonexistent yet somehow obviously visible eyebrows in that insufferably sly attitude of “Ooh no. You can’t say that and stop there. Now you HAVE to tell me every TITIBUS THE DETAILS. ALL THE DETAILS.”
Dawn saw her entire life flashing through her eyes. She was definitely going to be judged for her sins sooner or later.

“… O-ooookay uhhh, where could I even start?”

“Well, there’s just so much.”

“Just start with the juiciest parts,” Alphys whispered sneakily, letting her elbows rest on the table and crossing her clawed fingers so she could rest her head on the stable structure and look at her with a demonic grin.

The teenager hesitated for at least half a minute. But in the end... Who the hell cared?

They had already seen the worst part of the event, so it wasn’t like she could really make anything interesting. Besides, Alphys was the one asking, not her. The hell should that fourth wall still stay in place? Sans had worked so hard to obliterate it already.

She sighed, but ended up with a small evil smirk on the corner of her mouth and she calmly took her chance to bring it next to her, so they could sit side by side. Then, she pulled out of her jeans’ pocket her Special and pointed it at another.

“... She was so going to burn in hell for this. But I totally going to be worth it.”

“Well, I may or may not have a bunch of fanart videos downloaded on my phone,” she said in
videos downloaded on my phone.” She said in a careless tone, mockingly pretending that it wasn’t that much of a big deal.

When the lizard widened her eyes in sudden interest, she did not hesitate to let her check out her phone for a few seconds; but Alphys immediately returned it to her and asked her to just move on with what they really wanted to do with it. So she turned it on without further ado.

“Ah,bummer. It’s almost out of batteries, and I’m sure you guys won’t have a charger around for this.”

“Shh.” Alphys shook her head soothingly, overdramatically and jokingly, her smile still visible on her muzzle. “Who needs charging when you have... electricity magic?”

Jumping out of her seat to stand and take an animelike pose, she pointed dramatically at her phone so that immediately a few bolts zapped around in the air. She gradually raised the battery percentage in the right side of the screen, and incidentally made Dawn’s head straight on her head and start floating in the air. Too shocked by being literally surrounded by electric waves, too fearful to move and accidentally get zapped, touching anything, and yet too happily surprised to even think of running away, Alphys made anime real and have some genuinely looking at the textile material clumps near the clumps...
looking voluntarily stupid doing so, the human nothing but gape in disbelief with a wide open grin.
Alphys calmly and proudly sat back down on her resumed her former position with her head resting delicate and sly crossed arms.

“Now. Please continue.” she purred softly. 

... They really were doing this. Oh boy.

“Hmm... Do you know what an ‘AU’ is? ‘Alternate Universe’?”

“Oh! You mean things around the quantum multiverse theory, trees of possibilities and—”

“No-no-no.” She shook her head with a giant slashing her face from ear to ear. “Not in the physics meaning of the word. In the FAQ meaning of the word. Did you get to see stuff that with your own anime fandoms?”

“You mean w-what the fans do when think it’d be fun to change a few things in the canon universe, for example, switching the roles of some characters.”

“Exactly.” the human nodded exaggeratedly and slowly. “Let me introduce you to the won the Undertale fandom. Just a little warning—Y
the Undertale random. Just a little warning— you NEVER see Sans the same way after that. Ooo, about we start with *Underswap*? How would you imagine a character that looks like Sans, but has PAPYRUS’s personality?”

Alphys pondered the deepest implications of the possibility for an entire minute, as she remained still and blankly staring at the human without ever opening her eyes. Then, she straightened her back and her head rose, and she clicked her tongue loudly.

“Okay, now I **NEED** to see this.”

When Dawn was done eating her dinner and the two of them had been willing to find a more comfortable place to sit for the rest of their evening, they had made their way down to the basement and sat on the green couch that Sans had done nothing else. Alphys had said that the basement was sort of magical, which could only come to their advantage if the two of them wanted to keep the fanart and their howls of hysterical laughter as a much a secret as it could possibly be.

After a few hours of chatting around and listening to watching what the phone had in store for them, the two of the events eventually had the better of the other. Sans went down for a two-in-the-morning snack to check how they were doing, he found the

...
to check how they were doing, he found the sound asleep on the sofa, Dawn’s phone threatened out of her half-open hand.

--------------------------------------------------

It was early morning. Dawn and Alphys were still snoozing serenely. Then, quietly at first but gradually increasing in volume, a voice sneakily rose from the surrounding...

... beautiful day outside...

*Birds are singing... Flowers are blooming*

Dawn mumbled some grumpy curses under her breath as she attempted to wake up in confusion. Her definitely-not-morning-person mind made her feel she had heard this before, but her neuronal connections were still too slow to properly process what was happening. Was it morning already...? Shouldn’t her phone’s going off then? Naaah, if her phone hadn’t gone off, then it had to be way too soon for this. She still had...

... should be burning in hell.

She opened her eyes in shock as the horrifying realization suddenly clicked. In a pitiful attempt to jerk up being completely awake, she fell over the edge of the sofa, hitting the floor with a hard thud.
accidentally had Alphys accompany her in response to gravity’s invitation to meet the hard floor in the face of it.

**Turn around kid, it’d be a crime,**

Alphys forcefully detached her head away from the pillow as she jerked up awake and shrieked some nonsensical words along the lines of “**wu-wu-wu**”

First surprise: for some reason, the two girls and the sofa were now back in the living room.

**If I had to go back on the promise that I made...**

**So don’t step over that line,**

Dawn, becoming whiter and whiter by the second, stood up as fast as she could, letting Alphys stumble once again. She nervously turned her head to apologize and not make any attempt to help her up and instead moved away from the sofa as fast as possible.

Second surprise: her cell phone was gone.

**Or else friend, you’re gonna have a bad time,**

Dawn kept running all around the living room in rising anger, she tried to rifle through drawers and cupboards first in the living room and then in the kitchen before she considered searching upstairs, but for some reason she was simply unable to find where that
reason she was simply unable to find where that voice was coming from. Third surprise: given the volume of that damned music was pretty sure that her phone’s speakers were supposed to have enough power to play any song without any help from peripheral devices.

**So let’s go, let the room get chiller**

**Let’s go, dirty brother killer**

Every time she felt like she had found its origin, and she had made her way there it appeared that it somehow coming from the other end of the room as if the origin of the voice could teleport at will mess with her.

**Go ahead and try to hit me if you’re able**

“SANS!” Dawn ultimately scowled in pure rage, face red as a tomato. “WHERE THE FUCK DID YOU PUT MY PHONE!?”

**I can tell you’re getting really sick of trying**

Dawn could barely hear underneath the song that someone was doing his best not to laugh too loud she quickly found the origin of that last vociferously stomped her way to him, snatching her
away from his hands and turning the song off in a
... Sweet, sweet silence. None of the sighs
previously experienced in her entire life had ever
relieving as the one she just released.

“Sans. You’d better have a very good reas
waking us up at whatever-in-the-morning it
give Alphys a heart attack.”

Sans seemed about to lift a finger in order
to say something, but the expression on his skull made
what he had in mind, so she just interrupted him
could actually say it.

“I’ll have you know that trolling innocent people
are just trying to sleep peacefully is not a
good enough.”

“what do you mean?” he immediately retorted
in pseudo innocent tone and with a trollesquely
and betrayed look. “i just wanted to make
you’d be up and dandy right away, since you were
to help me today and everything. you were the one
who told me you wanted to get up early.”

Dawn hardly listened to him, since as soon as she
her hands back on her phone, she had simply
skimming through its contents in order to try to a
damage, because she just knew that he would stopped at just one joke.

A grumble escaped her gritting teeth when she immediately that he had changed her wallpaper to nothing else but a bad MS Paint meme. Apparently, he had seen the series of cringe-inducing posts parodying the “bad time” speech and eventually opted for the original. Admittedly, he didn’t actually look too bad, and he merely said “Youre on the verje of experiance unfortunet outcom my dearest frend.”

This looked terrible. But somehow, deep down in her heart, she just knew that this was far from the damage she had done to her only remaining property.

... Oh. There it was. She hesitated between sighing and palm-palming. After a split second of hesitation, she did...

“... You set exactly forty-eight alarms on my phone so it’d play an intentionally bad fandub of the
“You’d be dead where you stand” followed by an extended version of Megalo Strike Back’s remix for every single hour of every single day of every single week. I don’t even know why I’m surprised.” The reason she took a pause was because she needed to breathe. “And you changed my ringtone for... I don’t recognize this file.”
She perfectly knew that if she played that sound, she would regret it, but sadly for her and for everyone in the room, her curiosity had the better of her.

After a split second of static, an obvious sign that the recording was badly recorded and that the audio had a poor quality, she could only mean that listening to this would not be the most pleasant experience, she actually heard Sans’s voice.

*Hey there buddy chum pal friend buddy chum bud friend fella bruther amigo buddy friend chummy chum chum pal i don’t mean to be rude my friend pal home so bread slice dawg but i gotta warn ya if u try one more diddly darn step right there going to have to diddly darn snap ur neck wowza wouldn’t that be a crummy juncture*

Dawn paused the recording and raised a deadpan look. Sans’s grin was wider than ever. You could literally see the smug in his glowing pellets.

“I can’t believe you actually dubbed that one yourself, oh my God.”
“hey, if it can console you, i also changed my ringtone
And he shrugged. And he raised a different ancient cell phone from his pocket and pressed a button.

A do-ah deh, a-do-do, a-do-ah
A do-ah deeh, a-do-do, a-do-ah...

... Of all the freaking memes he could have found, he used this as his personal ringtone just for the fun of pissin’ me off. Mogolovonio started playing.

Dawn looked like she could see her entire life through her eyes. Sans finally found the mercy to stop the rest of the recording as he paused it. But his eyes only widened.

This was a nightmare.

No. He did NOT do that right now, no no no you are GOT to be kidding me...

So not only had Sans had the opportunity to mess with her phone, he had apparently managed to retrieve it and transfer it to his own belongings, meaning that even though now she had her phone with her and under her now constant supervision, she could not be saved.

“... Did you search through all my files?”
... Did you search through all my files?

All traces of anger had disappeared on her bland face. Only a primal fear could be heard through her words.

"naaah. don’t worry about it, i didn’t poke around too much. i only checked out one folder." Her eyes expanded again. “the one you named “shitpost” was filled with lots of great content, though.

The human froze in place, probably trying to contain the storm of emotions as best she could because she didn’t want an unfortunate murder to occur in such a sensitive moment.

But it was too late. Nobody would be able to stop this madness now.

In the end, she focused all her energy into one single strike to release it as best she could. She just had to start and focus her energy on what needed to be saved and get rid of what needed to be killed with fire.

“... Alphys. What was that one thing you said Sans being too scared to look at the fandom stuff?"

Alphys was face-palming.

“I meant fanarts. I never said anything about memes.”

Dawn had called it. She knew they would have had...
in hell for their sins, sooner or later.
She had just dared to wish that it wouldn’t be and savage.

“So… What were y-you doing outside?”

It had only taken a split second after the human’s appearance to notice that the hoodie she was wearing was not originally hers; and right after Sans had left, it seemed that the human in question had finally been reminded of that fact, as Alphys watched her remove it and slightly blush in embarrassment.

She sort of acted like a scared child or animal after being caught doing something they knew they should have refrained from doing, as if she were surprised, but not that much, that she was now given The Stare in response to her misdeeds. This was the look of the cat witnessing their owner come back home, and who watched warily yet guiltily because the owner was blocking its only exit and the cat was anticipating the moment the owner would notice what exactly it had done with the curtains in the living room.

Alphys liked cats. She wished she could have one, but sadly she could only know of them from how they were depicted in her favorite anime and other shows. From what she knew, these creatures were adorable, but sneaky and treacherous. And incredibly self-centered.

… Looks like they’re stuck on the awkward train. Great.

Honestly, it was beyond her how Sans had not even made the slightest remark about having her take some of his belongings without asking for his permission. Maybe he really did care that little about letting her do whatever she pleases. Part of her wanted to do the same, especially since she knew the context and kept trying to remind herself that this human was not supposed to be that dangerous… But how could they know that for sure?

The human gave her a nervous and somewhat guilty look, and then immediately went to put the jacket neatly on the coatrack next to the entry door — probably the exact place where she had originally found it. Alphys tried to stay on guard… But it seemed that what Sans had said was true.
This human had some proper manners, at least.

“I finished cleaning about thirty minutes ago. At first I thought I’d just wait for Sans to come back, but… This place just feels too sad and weird when nobody’s there.” she finally answered, a sheepish and shy smile trembling on her face. Totally a cat thing to do. “So I just borrowed a jacket and left a note on the TV in case he came back while I was out. I just thought I’d go take a walk in a place where it’s… normal to feel lonely.”

Alphys thought briefly of the places that could possibly fit this description and wouldn’t have required anyone to teleport in order to effectively reach them in a reasonable amount of time.

“You mean Waterfall?” she asked, lifting a non-amused eyebrow.

Dawn bit her bottom lip, averting the lizard’s gaze but soon nodding tensely. “Yeah. That was the plan at first, but then I realized it’d take much longer than I had planned, so… I turned around before I actually reached it.”

The reasoning was sound, and she looked perfectly honest, albeit a bit too shy for Alphys to completely disregard the possibility that she might be hiding something from her. But judging from her general demeanor…

Yes, it still seemed more likely that this human was restraining her movements and carefully choosing her words because of a kind yet somewhat awkward intent to appear as harmless as possible in order to break the ice as much as she could, more than because of something that would truly be malice.

“This place is a lot bigger than I anticipated… I would’ve loved to keep going at least until I reached the beginning of Waterfall, I always wondered what it’d look like in real life— it already looks gorgeous in the game… B-but I didn’t want Sans to worry. I’m sure he’s already got a lot on his mind, and he’s already been through so much… the last thing I’d want to do is bring him even more trouble.”

The human was not looking at anything anymore. She seemed to talk just for the sake of saying more things. Maybe there was that hope that the more she talked and said things to make herself look harmless and nice, the more she would manage to overcome the awkwardness.

She was still being very careful with her words, either because she wanted to be sure that she would not accidentally say something that would upset her due to her knowledge of specifically intimate details regarding her and the other ‘characters’ of that video game, or because she wanted to look
as innocent and gentle as possible until the right moment to attack was found. It looked more and more like the former, thankfully; but then again, what exactly was the difference between the two? The body language would be identical, since in both cases the goal was the same: make her interlocutor lower her guard.

“So it’s true. You really know everything there’s to know about this place.” The scientist’s look hardened warily. “Everything there is to know about us personally.”

“W-well… Y-y-yeah. I’m… sorry?”

Ugh. Will you two just get this over with already.

The monster shook her head heavily without looking at her, mumbling under her breath that there was no point in apologizing about this sort of thing and that they should just go to the kitchen because she should eat her dinner and since they were about to have a long chat anyway then she preferred to have the possibility to sit down.

Dawn did not find anything to say in order to either agree or object with her, so she merely followed her guidance and took a seat on the opposite side of the table. She still wasn’t feeling hungry enough yet, so the size of the sandwich intimidated her just a bit; however, the pleasant smell certainly made her want to at least give it a try.

Besides, hey! This was her chance to taste some monster food, wasn’t it? As it turned out, at least at first, this really tasted mostly like regular food— only one real difference was noticeable. There was this slight tingling sensation in her mouth, almost like some small sparks of static electricity, even though it really was different than that…

Strangely enough, it did not feel nearly as uncomfortable as her words made it sound like, way on the contrary; it was almost like a fifth taste that her body was not naturally able to feel or interpret correctly, and due to her inability to feel this taste properly, her brain was simply making up some kind of mystical impulse in order to grasp its nature as best as it could.

*The taste of magic, probably. How stupid is that, ha.*

The strangest part was when, as she swallowed, she felt the entirety of what she had intuitively assumed to be fully solid matter… merely dissolve into thin air, somewhere between her throat and her stomach. Oh well, part of her had actually been somewhat expecting this from what had been theorized by the fandom anyway.

When she raised her eyes and noticed that Alphys was still there and watching her in complete silence, she tried to thank her with a warm smile— but the scientist merely answered that Sans had
been the one responsible for bringing it in the first place. Awkward.

“Do you… want some?” the human asked tentatively, handing the sandwich closer to her.

“I already had dinner. Thanks.”

… Welp. She really was not making it easy to build a constructive conversation, was she?

Did she do something wrong? Was it because she was a human? Was it because she was a complete stranger to her but just so happened to know everyone already because of a game? Was it because she was the ‘Anomaly’ responsible for the Resets…?

Just do something to break the ice already, geez!

Admittedly, since Sans had forgiven her and all the other players so easily… She had sort of assumed that everyone else would either not know about the situation, or be even more okay with it than he had been. If anyone had the most rights to feel hurt and angry at them, it had to be him; the fact that Alphys would give her the cold shoulder like that… She really had not expected anything like this.

Then again, if Alphys of all characters people was acting like this… It had to mean that she had been hurt as well. Even though she was not sure by what exactly, she at least had a list of guesses, and she certainly felt the urge to amend to whatever pains she had unwillingly inflicted.

“L-look, I’m… I’m pretty sure saying that will mean nothing by now, but…” She inhaled sharply in order to increase her confidence and look more serious when she raised her grave eyes towards her. “I’m really sorry for what the game’s been doing to all of you. Whether in this timeline or in the other ones…”

“It’s okay.” she answered hastily, but she was avoiding her look. “I… I know you probably wouldn’t have done something like this if you knew. You wouldn’t have gone to… that extent, at least.”

“Everybody here is so sweet. Of course nobody in their right minds would want to wish pain or death on people like you.” Dawn murmured with a sad smile. “I’m glad Sans found a way to end it and give you a true happy ending.” She paused, but soon added with a brighter smile: “All of you.”

“We… we’re not there yet.”
“Ha, ha… Sorry, you’re right. Sans said it’d take a few weeks before the machine’s ready.” And honestly? The wait had to be unbearable.

How hard had it to feel like to be stuck in a Near-Genocide ending where everyone they cared about was long dead, just so they could save them later…?

There was nothing to worry about because they would succeed; but this was so unfair nonetheless… Sans, Alphys, everyone, they had to miss everybody so much, and they still had to wait, only to be greeted with people that would never acknowledge what they would have gone through, or even that they had been saved from a horrible fate through these heartbreaking hardships?

Heck, she had never had the chance to meet them in person, and yet she missed them already.

“… I wish everyone could be here with us. I know it won’t even matter in the end because the Reset will bring them back, but I still wish they could be alive and well right now, and…”

The human let her last sentence linger on the tip of her tongue as, when she raised her bittersweet gaze towards the lizard, she lost both her nostalgic smile and her words.

“And what?” Alphys asked coldly, as her harsh yet conflicted and shy look behind her glasses would dare scold nothing but the floor. “That you could’ve ‘befriended’ them? This is what you’re all interested in, isn’t it? To finally get to meet them too?”

Before the human could find the energy and words to move her lips in a coherent way, her eyes remained stuck gawking at the view: the way Alphys was glaring without daring to meet her eyes directly… A lot of words could have tried to describe it individually, without quite grasping its deepest intent. This glare was stern, but not aggressive; hurtful, but not mean-spirited.

“I know this must be hard in your specific situation, but you need to get real,” she added after just a split second, with a mystical tone that entirely fit with the meaning behind her eyes. Mysterious and full of wonder… but ruthless. “You’re not the self-insert protagonist from a cheesy fanfiction, so stop acting like it. We’re not prizes you get when you complete “side-quests” in a game.”

She gaped. “O-of course you’re not! I know you’re real, now. And that’s exactly because of that…”

“That’s it, huh…? Because we’re not just pixels anymore, you want to take your chance and live your own adventure here?” The lizard wearily spat a morose, yet bitter cackle. “Why do you want
to help us so badly? Because you know us from the game? Because we’re “celebrities” where you come from? Because if anyone believes you when you’re back home, you’ll get to brag about it?”

“What— No!”

“Then why? If you’re so sure, then why are you so interested in helping random strangers who basically just ripped you from everything you’ve ever known, including your own universe?!” Alphys’s outburst struck like thunderbolt. “If your reason is not because you’d “already know us” from the video game, then I don’t want to know how long your naivety would’ve lasted in the hands of any other criminals.”

“You— you’re not criminals!” the human jerked, offended and heart-struck.

“And what tells you that?!” she shrieked. “We’ve just met! You don’t know us!”

A long silence fell. When she felt her limbs start to shake, Alphys realized that, in the heat of the moment, she had stood up in a jolt; yet, she decided to stay perfectly still and watch: soon, she noticed exactly what kind of face was hiding on the opposite side of the table.

Hiding, indeed. The human had left her seat and was now almost entirely made invisible due to her hiding spot between the chair and the table, with just the top half of her head and the tips of her fingers still daring to sneak their way above the table. The only reason this half head was still sticking out was probably out of nothing but mere courtesy, as the turmoil roaring in her eyes contained a deluge of emotions, none of which could raise her confidence or reassure her from the glowing thunderstorm raging right in front of her.

Alphys slowly realized that she had let her magic out.

From a monster’s perspective, this kind of behavior was rarely ever considered to be something to be truly reckoned with. In most cases, a monster’s inability to control their magic when overwhelmed by emotions was undeniable evidence of this monster’s inexperience when it came to actually handling their magic in a precise and calculated way; the fact that no real bullets were present only proved Alphys’s lack of power and actual intent.

Still; seeing the look on the human’s face, one did not need to know much about her species’ culture to deduce that she definitely did not see this situation under the same perspective. Besides, Alphys knew the basics of human biology and electricity’s effects on their body; she doubted her ridicule sparks could be truly harmful unless she were to put her all into them, but she guessed that they probably looked intimidating enough as they were.
The scientist immediately lost the scowl on her muzzle and slowly went back to sitting at the kitchen table, slightly trembling. The air kept crackling with little white sparks for a few more seconds, but they soon died down when the curvy spines in the back of her head gradually deflated back to their usual position. She kept blinking forcefully a few more times, until the electric color in her eyes calmed down as well.

“I… I-i’m sorry I lashed out like this. I had a long day.” she muttered apologetically. “I’m sorry I scared you. I lost it a little, but, I’m not actually going to hurt you. I promise.”

The human waited for one more second, just to ensure that everything had calmed down enough; but soon, she gulped, nodded, then slowly and shakily, but surely made her way back on her seat.

“I-I never thought you’d…” She shook her head immediately, nervously interrupting her sentence. “S-sorry, that’s not how I should put it… What I wanted to say was…” She stopped again; she tried to turn a few words in her mind, but sadly, only one conclusion could be drawn after she achieved almost a full minute of silence: “… There really isn’t any way I can make it sound like I wasn’t about to compare you with how you’re depicted in the game. I’m sorry.”

“It’s… It’s okay.” Alphys repeated one more time, sighing. “I’m sure you can’t help it, especially if you’ve known the game for a while. How long does it make for you?”

“O-oh, uh… I-it must’ve been a bit less than half a year by now. I think.” Dawn took a short moment to reminisce the details. “I mean, I knew it existed before that, since my best friend kept telling me about it until I gave in and asked her what it was about. She’d even started chatting about it at school, of all times. That’s just how determined she was.” She paused to repress a little chuckle, mumbling humorously for herself: “Ha. Determined.”

Alphys froze, then blinked in what appeared to be a mixture between shock and very slow, horror-inducing realization. “S-school…?”

Dawn rose a confused face with wide eyes. “Oh, yeah. I’m in high school. You… know what it is, right? Do you guys have a different education system or…?”

“N-no, but, I just…” She fidgeted stressfully. “H-h-how o-old are you…?”

The human stared blankly. “… Fifteen?”
This single word had the same effect as lightning. Alphys’s muzzle trembled in an even more nervous way than before, to such extent that her glasses seemed to fall out. She buried her head in her clawed hands, her elbows heavily resting on the table.

“… You’re just a teenager. You’re not wearing stripes so I just assumed, but… Oh God. I’m talking existential crisis material with a kid. And I lashed out.”

… Apparently she had assumed that she was a lot older than she really was. This fact confused Dawn even further at first, because strangers sometimes mistook her for a twelve-year-old, but never for an adult. However, she soon remembered just how much monsters knew about humans in the first place— that was to say, hardly anything. She would have expected Alphys to know the difference due to her watching so much anime, but then again… Maybe she just didn’t know how to compare voluntarily exaggerated drawings with their real life counterparts.

Part of her felt a little offended that the lizard would call her a kid in the exact way she was saying it, but then again, she had to admit that this whole talk they had was, for the most part, flying over her head, or just giving her a headache. She could understand that Alphys had been hurt because of the video game being real, but… What was that thing about “prizes” all about? She just wanted to get to know these guys better and have the chance to potentially be their…

Oh, that was it, wasn’t it? That thing about befriending them just for… the ‘pride’ of getting to know famous, magic ‘characters’ that everybody thought to be fictional but who eventually turned out to be real. The ‘pride’ of saying that you knew a celebrity personally, times ten.

She wasn’t doing it for pride, was she? These guys were real. They had their own lives. All she wanted was to… What was she doing it for? If she had been kidnapped by any other kinds of magical creatures like aliens she didn’t know, or whom she would have known beforehand to be hostile, would she have reacted the same way? Absolutely not.

… Maybe Alphys had a point.

“I… I was just surprised, don’t worry… It’s alright if you needed to get some stuff out of your chest, too. I’m sure it must’ve been hard for you to… learn that you’re a video game character or whatever… That’s some crazy stuff. I have no idea what it must feel like for you… I-I’m sorry I made you feel that way.” Dawn murmured uneasily. “I-I think I’m starting to understand what you meant about acting like I know everyone and all, too… I can’t exactly help it so I wouldn’t want to make any promises, but I’ll do my best to… pretend I don’t know you? I-I’m not even sure what I’m supposed to do actually, b-but…”

“You don’t have to do anything, I’m the one who lost it.” Alphys assured, shaking her head vehemently. “I mean, you just got kidnapped. I guess I can’t completely blame you for clinging to what you know of the game… Of course you’d try to feel at home with us so you’ll better cope with the stress or something. I’m sure that if you didn’t know anything about us or this place…”
You’d probably freak out for days. Magic and monsters don’t exist in your world, right? Sans told me so.”

The human lowered her eyes and absent-mindedly gazed in the distance as if she could look past the table; but the slow and heavy nod she soon made showed that she was fully listening.

“Truth be told, I… I guess I was projecting a bit. Y-you probably know that, but… I’m k-kinda the craziest monster around when it comes to getting fond of fictional stories and whatnot. So when I learned about the game… Of course I started making some wild fantasies and thought about things like, h-how I’d react if one day I was the one who got kidnapped by the characters from my favorite anime.”

The human nearly said “It’s Mew Mew: Kissy Cutie, right?” by reflex, but fortunately managed to stop this thought from being uttered. Of course it was Mew Mew: Kissy Cutie, the game made it clear enough (although it was unclear whether it was a dating simulation game or an actual anime — both versions probably existed). There was no use saying this out loud other than just increasing the awkwardness and making Alphys uncomfortable for no reason; other than by just being the stupidest and smoothest Captain Obvious that could ever be.

Alphys was not looking at her anymore, so she did not notice anything that had ever transpired through her interlocutor’s head.

“I…’m not exactly sure I would’ve handled things the way I should, either. But I got to think about it. So… I know things must already be hard for you, and I’m sure that thinking of your situation as just “getting the chance to meet the game’s characters” is tempting and the most reassuring option you have… But if you can— please just try to consider this.” she muttered softly, but shyly and uncomfortably. “I’ll repeat just one more time… We’re not your prizes. We’ll just be neighbors for some time.” Her look swiftly shifted as she cracked a small, bittersweet smile: “I must admit, part of me was actually excited to meet someone like you— I have so many questions about your world and that video game, I swear that you are NOT ready.”

A small, yet genuine and somewhat mischievous giggle escaped her, and its honesty was contagious enough that soon, Dawn found herself laughing as well for an instant.

“Anyway… I’d really like to be your friend, eventually. It could be a lot of fun. But… I’d just really like it if that friendship could be because of something other than the game, you know? I mean… I g-guess I like to think that I could make real friends all by myself, instead of because of my status or something… I d-don’t know.”

When silence fell in the kitchen, Dawn was left to ponder a little more the lizard’s words; it seemed so intricate, she was struggling to try and make some sense out of it.. She just knew that there were
some hidden ambiguities concealed within the monster’s speech that could explain just how deeply she cared about that issue and why she would have bothered to speak for so long about it… But at least, she thought she easily had the gist of it and could understand where that came from.

She wondered whether wanting to befriend someone you literally met for the first time but grew to know very intimately because you saw that person through a screen and got to learn nearly everything about that person, was what being a creep or even a stalker was all about. It probably was. Even if she hadn’t done that on purpose because she was certain these people were fictive at first, the result was the same.

“I… I don’t think I got everything you wanted to tell me with this, but I’ll do my best to be careful.” she answered with a sheepish smile.

“It’s okay, I probably didn’t say it in the clearest way either. I’m still not sure how to say all of this anyway, so… I’m really just glad that you wanted to listen, at least.” Alphys dismissed lightly.

“You’ve probably had a lot on your mind too, right?”

“Oh yeah, totally.” the teenager sighed in exhaustion. “I’m completely new to all this magic and soul stuff and now time travel and I’m still trying to wrap my head around a lot of things with you guys being more than just video game characters, and all at the same time I don’t want to be a burden to any of you because I know from the game how much stuff you’ve all been through, but now I have to be careful because acting like I know this stuff and want to help you guys as if I’ve known you for ages is making you uncomfortable, which is exactly what I wanted to avoid and why I wanted to just be nice and helpful with you in the first place so you wouldn’t have to deal with me bringing you guys trouble…” There was another sigh, even longer and heavier than the previous one. She buried her head in her hands and took some time to breathe, until she admitted:

“… My head hurts.”

The scientist repressed a short, yet soft and warm laugh, as she watched the human with a satisfied and an almost, somewhat motherly look. Maybe more like the look of that protective big sister. In any case, it didn’t last for long, as she soon stood up from her chair, opened a cupboard, took out a glass and went to the sink. When Dawn was alerted by the sound of the running water, she noticed with surprise that the height of the sink was completely normal. Wasn’t there something in the game about that sink being insanely high so Papyrus could stack more bones in the cupboard below or something…? Oh who cared, she was too tired to play the ‘seven mistakes’ game. Maybe the sink was magic. Everything was magic here anyway.

Soon, Alphys handed her a glass full of cold water and a joking, yet caring smile. The human thanked her sincerely yet tiredly and took her time to empty it. It entirely evaporated as soon as she swallowed it, but at least it did seem to have some relieving effect on her headache.

Even the water counted as magic food. What the heck.
“… This place is weird.” she laughed incredulously. “It’s amazing, and I know I shouldn’t be expecting anything less, but it’s weird. I have so many questions about everything.”

“Same here. Take your time.” the scientist added jokingly, nodding in a mockingly solemn and wise gesture. “What aren’t you getting yet?”

“I’m just… not really sure? I mean, it looks so simple. I got kidnapped because the video game that exists in my world is affecting this one, and me being here can stop it. I really don’t know what else I should be getting from the situation apart from, well, the fact that you guys need me to stay here for some time until you’ve solved the problem once and for all.” She blinked slowly, then inhaled sharply through her nose, pursing her lips tightly. “But all at the same time, a lot of this situation just… doesn’t make that much sense to me.”

Alphys blinked blankly. “How so?”

“It’s probably ‘cause my best friend is a huge science nerd and she’s always saying stuff like ‘time travel doesn’t exist’ or whatever, so with that and magic being a thing here… I guess I still need to adjust to my mind being blown in more ways than just one.” She took a small pause to let a small yet bright and incredulous giggle escape her lips. “Right now, honestly, everything that happened sounds like the sort of stuff that’d happen in a bad shipping fanfiction or something. You even said it yourself.”

As if taken by a sudden fateful doubt, or as if she had just been stricken with the realization of just who she had been saying this to, the human’s face suddenly fell as she gave an almost fearful look at what she very well knew to be an otaku as well as an obsessive fanfiction writer who, if rumors were to be trusted, was leaning towards the cheesy romantic stories at best, the smut crackfics at worst.

“Please don’t ship me with anyone I don’t know how old anyone is here but I’m really just fifteen and in my country it’s illegal.” The realization of what she had just said struck once more, and part of her felt incredibly embarrassed and unclean for even having merely thought of this possibility on her own. Maybe she had been reading too many of those fanfics herself and had been corrupted by the fandom. She immediately face-palmed. “Uuugh, why did I say that…”

Dawn was pulled out of her thoughts when she heard a repressed yet somewhat sly and mocking giggle.

“S-sorry, I didn’t mean to…” Alphys brought a small slightly trembling fist to the end of her muzzle and forced a cough, avoiding her look. “T-there really are that many fanfics in your world?
Ones about… THIS happening, even?”

Call it whatever you like, I call it a show. A very boring sitcom for now, at that. I hope there’ll be at least some action to spice things up at some point.

“Uhhh…” Okay, what was anyone supposed to answer to that? This joke was getting slightly too meta for her own sanity and part of her was just starting to consider the possibility, and the idea of the existential crisis it induced wasn’t pleasant, to say the least. “… K kinda? Well, usually most of the fanfics I’ve seen that turn around that sort of dumb plot choose a… b better setting. Like, you guys are already on the surface or at least you’re all alive. A anyway most of the fanfics where Sans actually does something productive, end up in him getting paired with someone, so, uh, I usually avoid to read those ones. And I promise I’m not saying this just because you’re here.”

Alphys rolled her eyes jokingly. ‘Hey, don’t worry. This is real life here, you’re safe from that sort of weird fan fantasies.”

“Please don’t take this the wrong way, but somehow hearing this from a video game character doesn’t help at all.” the human retorted sarcastically, raising her eyebrows in an unamused expression yet smirking in a mixture between a joking intent, and pure disbelief. “No offense, but reality looks totally broken to me right now.”

The scientist exploded in loud laughs, and soon Dawn followed. The concert lasted for at least a few minutes, until exhaustion had the better of them and their respective needs for breathing took over their hilarity.

“Anyway… Sans didn’t tell me all that much about how it went.” Alphys eventually said. “How did you two… handle the situation?”

“… I was stupid. I don’t think there’s any other way to put it.” the human muttered sheepishly. “Craziest thing is, Sans thought at first that I was lying to his face and being an evil manipulator or something, while it was all really just a big misunderstanding. So… that was awkward. I’m just glad it’s solved now.”

Alphys repressed a small laugh once more, but maybe they had just laughed too much and they had now both exhausted their laughing batteries.

“Anyway, it’s… weird. Before I came here and all, at first I felt bad for him as, like, a character, because of what he’s going through and all, but then when I got to see what the fandom did to him and how big a deal he’d become, I g-guess I kinda started to think he was… overrated?” She
marked a pause to look down and bit her lip shamefacedly. “Now that I know that it was all real, though… I really feel bad about thinking that.”

Oh good, when she was acting so docile I thought she was just going to be one of those mindless fangirls that do nothing but follow him around like a little puppy.

“He’s being so nice, and… hopeful?” She blinked in confusion. “I really just want him to succeed. He deserves to reach that happy ending and then be left in peace for the rest of his life, the poor guy.” Dawn suddenly stopped her train of thoughts and froze when she saw the peculiar look on Alphys’s face. “…What? Did I say something wrong?”

Wait. That wasn’t the “You said something wrong and now my SOUL is broken due to the existential crisis” look. That was a smug look.

“Oh no, it’s not what you said. It’s just… he showed me your internet some time when he was trying to tell me about the video game.”

Dawn’s eyes widened in shock and horror. “You— you guys saw… the fandom?”

“Not much, sadly.” Alphys muttered dejectedly. “Sans wanted to convince me that he wasn’t just pulling my leg with that story of time travels and video game stuff, so eventually he just turned on his machine, connected his computer to one of your browsers, told me to search for the word ‘Undertale’ and said that it’d give me all the answers I needed.”

“Oh… ouch. He didn’t even try to be tactful with it…?”

“I really was annoying him and he probably thought I was wasting his time, by this point.” she shrugged and rolled her eyes jokingly. “Anyway, uh, long story short, let’s say he forgot to tell me how ‘Undertale’ was actually spelled.”

Dawn looked like she was about to fall off her chair while her eyes would just pop out and fly into the ceiling like a pair of helium balloons.

“That’s how I was convinced.” Alphys chuckled awkwardly. “I mean, I think we both know that he couldn’t have made this stuff up if he wanted to.”
This was a nightmare.

The poor guys. The poor, poor tortured souls, victims of the internet and the naivety and innocence of sweet blissful monsters who did nothing wrong and came all the way from their cocoon of virtual reality without knowing anything of humanity’s darkest side. Tainted forever by the merciless desires of a lusting fandom.

“You should have seen him.” Alphys’s hilarity was becoming harder and harder to repress as she was reminiscing. “He looked ready to blast the entire thing. Pretty sure the only reason he didn’t was because he needed it to save the universe or whatever. So instead he just grabbed the power cable and pulled it out. I kinda wanted to see the safer part of what you guys could’ve been working on, but Sans forced me to leave and asked me to never touch his machine again.”

There were no words. Dawn felt so sorry and all at the same time so powerless.

“He looks tough and all, but he can get flustered way too easily.” she shrugged again. “Anyway… I’ve been having this little suspicion for a while, and what you said about him only brought even more… consistence to this headcanon.”

“What… exactly do you mean by that?”

“Hmm. How would you feel if I told you that even if he’ll never admit it out loud and just pretend he’s fine like always, he’s way too shy to look up any of the fandom stuff?”

“I’d… be relieved? Honestly, I totally understand him on that part. That must’ve been horrible.” Dawn winced overdramatically. “I’m actually happy that he won’t try to look for even more of that stuff. I don’t know what he’s seen but he’s definitely seen enough to scar him… I REALLY don’t know how he’d react, knowing what the fandom has done with him.”

At first, upon listening to her small rant, Alphys gave her a sheepish look, probably feeling somewhat bad about her friend. But when the last words fell into silence, the lizard paused— and, very gradually, an evil Grinch-like grin crept its way up on her muzzle as she slowly turned her head towards the human, sending her a demonic look and playing with her nonexistent yet somehow still very obviously visible eyebrows in that insufferably smug and sly attitude of “Ooh no. You can’t say that and then stop there. Now you HAVE to tell me everything. I DEMAND the details. ALL the details.”

Dawn saw her entire life flashing through her eyes. She was definitely going to be judged for her sins sooner or later.
“… O-ooookay uhhh, where could I even begin. There’s just so much.”

“Just start with the juiciest part.” Alphys whispered sneakily, letting her elbows rest on the table and crossing her clawed fingers so she could rest her head on the stable structure and stare at her with a demonic grin.

The teenager hesitated for at least half a minute.

But in the end… Who the hell cared?

They had already seen the worst part of the fandom, so it wasn’t like she could really make anything worse. Besides, Alphys was the one asking, not her. So why the hell should that fourth wall still stay in place after Sans had worked so hard to obliterate it already.

She sighed, but ended up with a small evil smile in the corner of her mouth and she calmly took her chair in order to bring it next to her, so they could sit side by side. And then, she pulled out of her jeans’ pocket her Special Attack.

… She was so going to burn in hell for this. But this was totally going to be worth it.

“Well, I may or may not have a bunch of fanarts and videos downloaded on my phone.” she said in a fake careless tone, mockingly pretending that it was not that much of a big deal.

When the lizard widened her eyes in sudden interest, she did not hesitate to let her check out her phone for a few seconds; but Alphys immediately returned it to her and asked her to just move on with what they really wanted to do with it. So she turned it on without further ado, and…

“Ah, bummer. It’s almost out of batteries, and I’m sure you guys won’t have a charger around for this thing.”

“Shh.” Alphys shook her head soothingly yet overdramatically and jokingly, her smile still widely visible on her muzzle. “Who needs chargers when you have… electricity magic!”

Jumping out of her seat to stand and take an anime-esque pose, she pointed dramatically at her phone screen and immediately a few bolts zapped around in the air, which gradually raised the battery percentage in the right corner of the screen, and incidentally made Dawn’s hair stand straight on her head and start floating in the air.

Too shocked by being literally surrounded by electric waves, too fearful to move and accidentally get zapped by touching anything, and yet too happily surprised to see Alphys make anime real and
have some genuine fun looking voluntarily stupid doing so, the human could do nothing but gape in disbelief with a wide open grin.

Alphys calmly and proudly sat back down on her chair and resumed her former position with her head resting on her delicate and sly crossed arms.

“Now. Please continue.” she purred smugly.

… They really were doing this. Oh boy.

“Hmm… Do you know what an ‘AU’ is? As in, ‘Alternate Universe’?”

“Oh! You mean things around the quantum multiverse theory, trees of possibilities and—”

“No-no-no.” She shook her head with a giant grin slashing her face from ear to ear. “Not in the real physics meaning of the word. In the FANDOM meaning of the word. Did you get to see stuff like that with your own anime fandoms?”

“You mean w-what the fans do when they think it’d be fun to change a few things in the canon universe, for example by switching the roles of some characters?”

“Exactly.” the human nodded exaggeratingly widely and slowly. “Let me introduce you to the wonders of the Undertale fandom. Just a little warning— You will NEVER see Sans the same way after that. Ooh, how about we start with Underswap? How would you imagine a character that looks like Sans, but with PAPYRUS’s personality?”

Alphys pondered the deepest implications of the possibility for an entire minute, as she remained perfectly still and blankly staring at the human without even blinking.

Then, she straightened her back and her head rose before she clicked her tongue loudly.

“Okay, now I NEED to see this.”

When Dawn was done eating her dinner and the two girls had been willing to find a more comfortable place to spend the rest of their evening, they had made their way to the basement and sat on the green couch that Sans had left there. Alphys had said that the basement was soundproof, which could only come to their advantage if they wanted to keep the fanart and their howls of
hysterical laughter as much a secret as it could possibly be.

After a few hours of chatting around and listening to or watching what the phone had in store for them, the weight of the events eventually had the better of them. When Sans went down for a two-in-the-morning snack and came to check how they were doing, he found the two girls sound asleep on the sofa, Dawn’s phone threatening to fall out of her half-open hand.

It was early morning.

Dawn and Alphys were still snoozing serenely.

Then, quietly at first but gradually increasing in tone and volume, a voice sneakily rose from the surrounding silence.

… beautiful day outside...

Birds are singing... Flowers are blooming...

Dawn mumbled some grumpy curses under her breath as she attempted to wake up in confusion. Her groggy definitely-not-morning-person mind made her feel like she had heard this before, but her neuronal connections were still too slow to properly process what was happening.

Was it morning already…? Shouldn’t her phone’s alarm be going off then? Naaah, if her phone hadn’t gone off yet then it had to be way too soon for this. She still had time.

… should be burning in hell.

She opened her eyes in shock as the horrifying realization suddenly clicked. In a pitiful attempt to jerk up while not being completely awake, she fell over the sofa and accidentally had Alphys accompany her in response to gravity’s invitation to meet the hard floor in the process.

Turn around kid, it’d be a crime,

Alphys forcefully detached her head away from the floor in alarm as she jerked up awake and shrieked some panicked nonsensical words along the lines of “wu-wu-wu-whaaa?”

First surprise: for some reason, the two girls and the couch were now back in the living room.
If I had to go back on the promise that I made for you,

So don’t step over that line,

Dawn, becoming whiter and whiter by the second, stood up as fast as she could, letting Alphys stumble on the floor again. She nervously turned her head to apologize, but did not make any attempt to help her up and instead dashed away from the sofa as fast as possible.

Second surprise: her cell phone was gone.

Or else friend, you’re gonna have a bad time.

Dawn kept running all around the living room in panic and rising anger, she tried to rifle through drawers and cupboards first in the living room and then in the kitchen before she considered searching upstairs, but for some reason she was simply unable to find where that damned voice was coming from.

Third surprise: given the volume of that damned music, she was pretty sure that her phone’s speakers were not supposed to have enough power to play any song that loud without any help from peripheral devices.

So let’s go, let the room get chiller

Let’s go, dirty brother killer

Every time she felt like she had found its origin, as soon as she had made her way there it appeared that it was now somehow coming from the other end of the room. It was as if the origin of the voice could teleport at will just to mess with her.

Go ahead and try to hit me if you’re able,

“SANS!” Dawn ultimately scowled in pure rage, her face red as a tomato. “WHERE THE FUCK DID YOU PUT MY PHONE!?”
Dawn could barely hear underneath the song that a certain someone was doing his best not to laugh too loudly, but she quickly found the origin of that last voice and vociferously stomped her way to him, snatching her phone away from his hands and turning the song off in an instant.

… Sweet, sweet silence. None of the sighs she had previously experienced in her entire life had ever been as relieving as the one she just released.

“Sans. You’d better have a very good reason for waking us up at whatever-in-the-morning it is and give Alphys a heart attack.”

Sans seemed about to lift a finger in order to say something, but the expression on his skull made it clear what he had in mind, so she just interrupted him before he could actually say it.

“I’ll have you know that trolling innocent people who are just trying to sleep peacefully is not a reason good enough.”

“what do you mean?” he immediately retorted in a pseudo innocent tone and with a trollesquely solemn and betrayed look. “i just wanted to make sure you’d be up and dandy right away, since you wanted to help me today and everything. you were the one who told me you wanted to get up early.”

Dawn hardly listened to him, since as soon as she had got her hands back on her phone, she had simply started skimming through its contents in order to try to assess the damage, because she just knew that he wouldn’t have stopped at just one joke.

A grumble escaped her gritting teeth when she noticed immediately that he had changed her wallpaper for nothing else but a bad MS Paint meme. Apparently he had seen the series of cringe-inducing posts parodying his “bad time” speech and eventually opted for the one where admittedly, he didn’t actually look too bad, and the text merely said “Youre on the verje of experiancin a very unfortunet outcom my deerest frend.”

This looked terrible. But somehow, deep down in her SOUL, she just knew that this was far from the damage Sans could have done to her only remaining property.
… Oh. There it was. She hesitated between sighing and face-palming. After a split second of hesitation, she did both.

“… You set exactly forty-eight alarms on my phone so it’d play an intentionally bad fandub of the line “You’d be dead where you stand” followed by the extended version of Megalo Strike Back’s Chara remix for every single hour of every single day in the week. I don’t even know why I’m surprised.” The only reason she took a pause was because she needed to breathe. “And you changed my ringtone for… Wait, I don’t recognize this file.”

She perfectly knew that if she played that sound file she would regret it, but sadly for her and for everyone else in the room, her curiosity had the better of her.

After a split second of static, an obvious sign that it was badly recorded and that the audio had a poor quality which could only mean that listening to this would not be the most pleasant experience, she actually heard Sans’s voice.

As in, the real Sans’s voice.

*hey there buddy chum pal friend buddy pal chum bud friend fella bruther amigo pal buddy friend chummy chum chum pal i don’t mean to be rude my friend pal home slice bread slice dawg but i gotta warn ya if u take one more diddly darn step right there im going to have to diddly darn snap ur neck and wowza wouldn't that be a crummy juncture—*

Dawn paused the recording and raised a deadpan look.

Sans’s grin was wider than ever. You could literally *breathe* the smug in his glowing pellets.

“I can’t believe you actually dubbed that one yourself oh my God.”

“hey, if it can console you, i also changed mine.”

And he shrugged. And he raised a different ancient-looking cell phone from his pocket and pressed a button.
… Of all the freaking memes he could have found and used as his personal ringtone just for the fun of pissing her off, *Mogolovonio* started playing.

Dawn looked like she could see her entire life flashing through her eyes. Sans finally found the mercy to spare her the rest of the recording as he paused it. But his smug grin only widened.

This was a nightmare.

*No. He did NOT do that right now, no no no you have GOT to be kidding me…*

So not only had Sans had the opportunity to mess with her phone, he had apparently managed to retrieve its data *and* transfer it to his own belongings, meaning that even if she had now her phone with her and under her now would-be constant supervision, she could not be saved.

“… Did you search through all my files?”

All traces of anger had disappeared on her blanched face. Only a primal fear could be heard through her words, now.

“*naaah. don’t worry about it, i didn’t poke around too much. i only checked out one folder.*” His grin expanded again. “the one you named “shitpost.” it was filled with lots of *great* content, though.”

The human froze in place, probably trying to contain her storm of emotions as best she could because she definitely didn’t want an unfortunate murder to occur in such a place.

But it was too late.

Nobody would be able to stop this madness now.

In the end, she focused all her energy into one sigh, trying to release it as best she could. She just had to stay patient and focus her energy on what needed to be saved, instead of what needed to be
killed with fire.

“… Alphys. What was that one thing you said about Sans being too scared to look at the fandom stuff?”

Alphys was face-palming.

“I meant fanarts. I never said anything about memes.”

Dawn had called it. She knew they would have had to burn in hell for their sins, sooner or later.

She had just dared to wish that it wouldn’t be that soon and savage.

Read via Screenshots Here (full formatting but may encounter loading issues)
Learn When to Quit

The Prompter Echoes

2016, May 1st

Life Spam

» Read the PDF version here! «

» Read on tumblr here! «

This is the main index where you can choose which way you wish to read the chapter.

Read via Screenshots Here (full formatting but may encounter loading issues)

Read Plain Text Here (formatting limited to what AO3 can do)
Can You Really Call This TVF’s Official?
I Didn’t See Any Temmies Or Anything

– Sunday, May 1, 2016 –

**Yoshua**

Guys, did any of you hear about Harl’s last twitch event? The one where he does some sort of magic trick for no reason and then he hears from him again so he just let him figure out what happened? :/

**CoolSkeleton03**

Dude

That happened like forever ago right? Personally i never watched him but whatever if he wants to get some attention by doing the creepy mysterious stuff, making himself victim of some sort of creepypasta what do you want me to do? Are people still talking about it?

**Yoshua**


I don’t know, my tumblr dash is still clogged with some theories and stuff. I try to read it every now and then.

and when I did some research about that was about it looked like a sensible thing..

* BlueDoppler is now online [13:52:33]

Yoshua
Oh hey Lys!
By any chance, do you know some stuff about Harlonke’s ”ghost livestream” that was never recorded or uploaded?

BlueDoppler
Hahaha
HAHAHA!

Yoshua
uh

CoolSkeleton03
?

* KangarooBrush is now online [13:53:02]

Yoshua
ok
KangarooBrush
Hello to you too, Lys :)

Calliope Quill
Oh, there we go.

BlueDoppler
Guys, I did it!
I finally DID IT!!

* WinDows Gulim is now online [13:54:13] *

Calliope Quill
Doppler is finally divulging to the world the dormant mad scientist who dwells threateningly in the meand of her mind, uh?

KangarooBrush
Isabel, please...

BlueDoppler
Oh shut up already, Quill. Not now. This moment is too perfect and I CANNOT let it happen.

WinDows Gulim
What’s the matter, Lys?

CoolSkeleton03
Just 2 mins in and I already have no idea what’s going on anymore.

Like wow

**BlueDoppler**
This is FINALLY happening, guys. I’m not even kidding.

**Calliope Quill**
Now I’m the lost one. What have we been apparently “hyping” for exactly?

**BlueDoppler**
Dawn. She’s finally doing it.

**Joshua**
OMG

**CoolSkeleton03**
Whaaaaaat?

**WinDows Gulim**
Noo... Really?

**Calliope Quill**
Still in the dark here.

**WinDows Gulim**
Oh Glob, I’m so proud of you right now.
How did you do it?
**BlueDoppler**
Sometimes blackmail is for the good =)
**KangarooBrush**
Aaw, geez... :(

**BlueDoppler**
And now she HAS to play it \o/

**Yoshua**
ON LIVESTREAM!
I WANNA SEE THIS OMG
**Calliope Quill**
... Right. The "Plup Game."
Ooh boy.
**Yoshua**
LET'S START THE CALL RIGHT NOW!

**WinDows Gulim**
Yosh, she's not even online yet... :)

**Yoshua**
THEN WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR??? LET'S BRING HER ALREADY!
... You're in her house now, right? o3

**BlueDoppler**
Nah, we just had lunch together. I’m home with my laptop now. But I expect her to login in... Maybe more minutes?

Pineapplup
Guess again, Lys. I was stalking.

Yoshua
YUIFDRTDKJBVGFJGH

BlueDoppler
... Oh.

Pineapplup
And I REALLY want you to give it back soon as this is over. I’m counting on it.

Yoshua
A WILD PIPLUP APPEARED!!!

BlueDoppler
Don’t worry Dawn, it’s safe. C’mon, you can trust me!

I’ll take good care of it

Pineapplup
That’s exactly what I’m afraid of...
**WinDows Gulim**
It's alright P. She'll give back... what is she took from you.

**Pineapplup**
Yeah yeah, whatever.
Btw, hi Joystick.

**Yoshua**
Hi

**Yoshua**
SO ARE YOU DOING THAT LIVESTREAM OR NOT??? :DDD

**Pineapplup**
"sigh"
I guess I don't have a choice uh.

**Yoshua**
no u don't 🤣

**Pineapplup**
...

welp
Lys, do you mind if I use your Steam and reset your game?

**BlueDoppler**
You know I don’t :p

**Pineapplup**
heh
I hate yall. Cant believe youd betray me like this.
but eh why the heck not
Well, I’ll see you guys in a few minutes I guess.
In the meantime you can prepare the popcorn or whatever

Yoshua

???????? I can’t wait!!!❤️

Calliope Quill
Well, I’ll be off and leave you to... whatever it is you’re about to do.
For my part there’s still a chapter to finish today.

CoolSkeleton03
Oh nice!! Will you review my fanfic when ur done?

Calliope Quill
...
No.
I was about to type a sarcastic comment about the relevance of your writing but then I realized it probably wasn’t worth the effort.

Yoshua
Yoshua
Duh. Not everyone types in chatrooms the same way they write novels, Dickens.
Especially when they’re on their phones.

* Calliope Quill is now offline [14:01:52]

WinDows Gulim
Agreed. Phone keyboards are the worst.

Yoshua
btw I **LOVE** how your story is going so far Arty. I really think it’s great!! Don’t let the grinch make you think otherwise...

... fuck

BlueDoppler
I didn’t know you were a Genocider, 8D

Yoshua
**DANG IT WHY**
Forget about the red. I meant it in a way, of course xD
I always forget how the bold and italic options change the color of the font instead of ACTUALLY making it bold and italics here. How did you even do that?
**WinDows Gulim**
Ehhhh, I have my ways ;)

**CoolSkeleton03**
haha thanks yosh
you didn’t think the megalovania part was too much?

**BlueDoppler**
Eh, don’t worry about it.
You know how it works with fanfics.
No matter what happens, you can always make it worse than you.
(Case in point with Quill1mao)

**KangarooBrush**
Um, Lys, no offense, but Isabel is definitely the best writer I’ve ever read.

**BlueDoppler**
Well it’s not that she’s a bad writer, mean is that her FANFICS are terrible. I mean ok she writes like if she was reincarnation of Tolkien or something.
But.
Have you just. READ her stuff?
KangarooBrush
Of course I have. It was some excellent work 😝

BlueDoppler
It’s well written, ok. But she’s so attached to the canon, rejects ANYTHING that isn’t 100% canon to be in the game. When you limit yourself so much, how do you make your story interesting? Do there’s literally no surprises EVER? No imagination from HER?

Yoshua
Haha, good point

BlueDoppler
Okay she writes wonderfully and she knows how to make ANYTHING sound badass, she writes about it, but... Her stories are just so boring when always see from a mile away what’s about to happen 😯
By now her writing only makes me smile honesty. At least if she’s going to something and EVERYONE knows how it
Gonna end, can’t she make it short?

CoolSkeleton03

_all hail to the one who could review calliope’s fanfics lmao_

BlueDoppler

_HAHAHA BOW BEFORE YOUR FANFICTION _

My Precious Slaves

_xD Seriously though someone really needs to get her off her high horse one of these days_

Yoshua

She brags so much about how writing can only be done her way or else it’s crap lol

You think she’s trying to compensate for some other thing she’s lacking? ;p

KangarooBrush

Enough you two, please leave her alone with this... If you want to discuss that K all problems, then talk about it in private. And definitely not behind Isabel’s back.

Yoshua

_yes ma’am_
KangarooBrush
Anyway... Don’t you think it’s been a while since Dawn’s last message? How’s he going?

BlueDoppler
...true... It must’ve been at least thirty minutes by now...?

Yoshua
Hey, she’s not bailing out NOW is she!

BlueDoppler
Hey @Pineapplup you’re not getting that easily! I want my stream!

BlueDoppler
I don’t know, I don’t think she would stand up like that...

Yoshua
She seemed really attached to that sheet I found :o It looked like she was feeling embarrassed about it so I guess she composed it, but I can’t read sheet music...

BlueDoppler
It’s not like I could understand what’s wrong with it... But don’t worry, I’m sure she’s fine...
CoolSkeleton03

She’s dead

BlueDoppler

She did look pretty mad an hour ago maybe she just F4’d and now that the screen is on full screen she forgot everything that’s going on around it? idk

You know how she gets when she’s depressed something u_u

The rest of the world just ”magically disappears” and there’s nothing you can do to get her out except smack her in the face of her head or whatever

WinDows Gulim

At this point I wonder if she’ll be the first one to prove that it’s possible to get past Flowey’s first fight or something like that...

CoolSkeleton03

No but seriously you think she’s passed Toriel yet? XD

KangarooBrush

Getting past Toriel isn’t the biggest problem if her health is lowered during that fight
HP within the first few turns x) I’m concerned about the rest of the Run honestly
If she finds a Vegetoid she might get a bit more trouble...

CoolSkeleton03
Pff at this point even the first friend will kill her lmao

Joshua
Oh my GOD guys, have some faith in her dammit!

BlueDoppler
Heh. I don’t know, Jocelyn...
Dawn and I have been childhood friends since third grade. You know how rats and all ”sciencey” I get all the time right? But when I tell you that Dawn is literally CURSED by videogames, may I be joking, but it’s always been THAT bad. I don’t know how she does it but she always finds some sort of way to literally break the game. SOMEHOW.
I mean, why did YOU think making her Undertale was that much of a big deal?

Joshua
Excuse me what
BlueDoppler
I can’t believe you joined the Plups without knowing what it was REALLY XD

Joshua
Hey come on, you know me! I just roll with the flow XD
And since it was a joke with Dawn and the center of course I couldn’t just NO lmao

CoolSkeleton03
Pff ok I know Dawn always says she’s into video games and that she’s so bad there should be an award for that but a C8 lol

KangarooBrush
I’ll admit I don’t remember this the curse either... But I guess if YOU are saying this, then you already have evidence stacked up in order to prove a point? :p

BlueDoppler
Oh you have no idea, my case is FULL. Here’s a random anecdote: there was a time when I was playing Pokemon...
time when she was playing Pokémon Platinum and she found a freaking ABSOL on the FIRST TRY. It was hail and all, so she just decided to try it a status condition that’d make it easy to catch and then wait patiently for hail to weaken it.

So during the first turn, she just paralyzed it, and then the plan was to keep switching out until it was close to the red.

But that’s when things got insane. But it was the wild Absol’s turn.

CoolSkeleton03
Ok now you have to tell us xD

Windows Gulim
A shiny absol? Now I don’t think that one but it HAD to be gold :)

BlueDoppler
Right on the first turn, the wild Absol uses Pursuit. There’s not much effect. The hail hurts both Pokemon on the Dawn decides to switch out. The wild Absol uses Pursuit again.
The switch occurs.
And then that’s when the festival begins.
Rain continues to fall. The sandstorm.
The sunlight is strong. Hail falls.
Each Pokemon is somehow hurt EVERYWHERE.
Their ABILITIES.
Both Pokemon faint.
The end.

**Yoshua**
but
how did she

**Windwos Gulim**
That was even better than I expected.

**Yoshua**
what the fuck???

**KangarooBrush**
...
Oh my.

**Yoshua** needs to reboot her brain.

**CoolSkelet0n03**
Press f to pay respects to the kami.
shiny absol

**Yoshua**
f
BlueDoppler

Later on I heard about that "acid rain glitch", but wherever I looked people were adamant that the glitch was only supposed to activate when it was the PLAYER Pokemon that was hit by the Pursuit move, so if it was the wild Pokemon then it wasn’t supposed to work.

(f yes you should’ve seen our faces then OOF xD)

... Besides, the damage wasn’t supposed to be that strong, at least not nearly strong enough to get an OHKO out of both Pokemon in just one turn.

So, my conclusion is, "???"

CoolSkeleton03

F

WinDows Gulim

... f

I think I heard about it a few years ago, yeah. Apparently it affected the HQ battle games too. But it’s true that this can looks weird... I wish I could look into it more.

KangarooBrush
Windows Gulim

Then again, what ELSE is new with all the experiments you led that involved video games being in the same room?

BlueDoppler

I know, right? XD

Anyway, I won’t tell every single story separately, but long story short, D has a record of LITERALLY breaking every single videogame she comes across. Nobody knows how she does it, ESPECIALLY NOT HERSELF.

KangarooBrush

This is concerning... but hilarious and fascinating x’D

BlueDoppler

The most common way she does it is by activating glitches in the game that she knew about, or ones that are known to be insanely hard to accomplish... And somehow she manages to do that consistently half the time XD
Yoshua

I'm absolutely 2 fab 4 u bitches

#Shiny
Swag
ACID
Tears

Sorry I had to

BlueDoppler

...

CoolSkeleton03

Haha oh shit this is too powerful

KangarooBrush

Oh boy :’D

BlueDoppler

Joss this is somehow perfect and you still hate you
But this is still perfect
**Windows Gulim**

Welp, I can’t believe I didn’t see this coming. Congrats on doing it so fast. Your drawing skills are actually pretty good now o:

**Joshua**

Haha, tanks xD Guess it’s just years of experience in shitposting 8D

**BlueDoppler**

Anyway... Back to the point, if you asked me :p

NOW, do you have ANY IDEA what could have happened if we tried this with **UNDERTALE**?

**Joshua**

... Oh my God she’s so screwed.

**BlueDoppler**

I tried to warn you \_(○’◡’○)_/

Then again, ok, I still have to admit she’s been improving. I recently tried to help her with some random rhythm game, but who’s Dawn without her passion and skills in music, RIGHT?

And uh. After a week she managed to actually finish the first level?
Hey, at least she even taught me something in the end.
On that day I learned that the rank system somehow EXISTS on that game???

Windows Gulim
Oooh right, that one XD
The infamous "Backwards Secret Room Goobers" XD

Yoshua
PFFFFFT XD
Who wants to bet she’ll get that glint where Sans walks out of the screen?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGxQ
Still, it’s too bad... I wish we could go further in progress_.

* Jerry. is now online [14:26:19]

KangarooBrush
Oh, hello!

Jerry.
Hi folks! What’s up?

Windows Gulim
You won’t believe what happened. Dawn is playing Undertale!
Jerry.

... DUDE. YOU’RE NOT SERIOUS.

BlueDoppler

THIS IS 100% SERIOUS
... Well we don’t get to see her play but I’m sure she’ll have some stuff later :p

Jerry.

Ugh... I wish I could’ve been the one working on a plan to make her play. Oh well. Who’s the lucky winner?

BlueDoppler

This girl right here What was the prize again? I think we were about a special rank at some point. Oh and you all owe me a UT gift for the ConnectiCon meeting. I want my mentee

Jerry.

There, done

bIgWiNNer~pRoFeSSIoNaLpLuPPeR

Oh, you mean the rank?

... DANG IT LEE
Jerry.

bIGWiNNER~pRoFeSSIoNaLpLuPPeR

HOW DID YOU EVEN MANAGE TO MAKE AN
GOD OF HYPERDEATH RANK XD

WinDows GuLIm

Pfft, nice one XD

KangarooBrush

Oh come on x)

Jerry.

x)

Wait Steven

You’re STILL online? It’s like 7:28
doesn’t that mean it’s literally the
of the night for you?
I swear you’re online more and more
at the US time now
Doesn’t that mean you’re online at your
weird hours for the Australian time?

WinDows GuLIm

Ehhh, it’s just a habit of getting up
and going to bed even earlier by now

CoolSkeLeToN03

What time is it in australia es?
What time is it in Australia?

BigWinner~pRoFeSSIoNaLpLuPpEr
4:29 am

Windwos Guliim
4:29
wait what

Yoshua
HAHAHA GOOD JORB LYS

CoolSkeleton03
Wait a sec how did you know the answer fast? You're not from Australia too are you? :o

Yoshua
of course not Artie!! xD

you kno Dawn and Lys live in Peensy
(wait am i typin it right???)

Jerry.
It's "Pennsylvania." And John, did you check your sister's phone again? :p

Yoshua
nah not dis time
but with only 1 comp at home how do us to b online at the same time if slashin us over the home pc
Jerry.
Haha, good point x)

Joshua
Joss is in the bathroom rn so i don't shed care if i take her place for a

CoolSkeleton03
Seriously i'm still confused how do that Lys? You answered in like 5s to

bIgWiNNer~pRoFeSSioNaLpLuPPpEr
I just have very good reflexes :p

Joshua
haha ye SURE
i bet it has somethin to do with the watch u wear on ur RIGHT wrist ;));)

WinDows Gulin
... You wear two watches Lys? __.

bIgWiNNer~pRoFeSSioNaLpLuPPpEr
SHUT UP WHO CARES ABOUT MY FASHION

Joshua
aw it has nuthin to do with fashion
everybody knos what u 2 shoud do ex
turselfs u dorks
Jerry
Jerry.
(shit it's already time for my even shift)
see you guys later!

* Jerry. is now offline [14:30:59]

bIGWiNNEr~pRoFeSSIoNaLPpUPpEr
John don't you dare
... WAIT LEE AM I GOING TO KEEP THAT FOR EVAH NOW IS THAT A REAL THING??

Yoshua
❤️ * Flirt

* Yoshua was kicked by
bIGWiNNEr~pRoFeSSIoNaLPpUPpEr [14:31:28]

WinDows Gulim
Whoa hey, calm down Lys :)

bIGWiNNEr~pRoFeSSIoNaLPpUPpEr
Come on, he deserved it xD
... But yeah, sorry, I guess I AM getting little tense rn. I'm still thinking of Dawn.
It's been more than half an hour by right? What IS she doing???

* Yoshua is now online [14:32:49]
bIgWiNNnEr~pRoFeSSsIOnALpLuuPPpEr
oh wait I just noticed her brother
a text... that’s weird

Yoshua
Hey yall I’m back
And don’t worry Lys, John got some
in revenge :p
It’s weird yeah, I sent Dawn some text
she doesn’t answer them either...

bIgWiNNnEr~pRoFeSSsIOnALpLuuPPpEr
SHIT WHAT THE HELL
gotta go

Yoshua

Lyyyyys?
What did I miss? D:

* bIgWiNNnEr~pRoFeSSsIOnALpLuuPPpEr is now on
  [14:33:13]

Yoshua
uuuuuuuh thanks for explaining what
going on???

WinDows GuLiM
Uh oh, this looks serious...

Yoshua
Steven, she probably sent you a DM...
Steven, she probably sent you a PM, right?
WinDows Gulum
Nope :/

* WinDows Gulum is now offline [14:33:58]

* Calliope Quill is now online [14:34:04]

Yoshua
BWAHAHA OH NOW I SEE WHAT IT IS XD
CALLIOPE NOW LYS HATES YOU SO MUCH SENSE WHEN YOU”RE ABOUT TO ARRIVE IN

Calliope Quill
... Can somebody explain what really happened?

Yoshua
Nobody knows but your timing was poor XD

Calliope Quill
Why does Doppler have...? Actually, even going to ask.

KangarooBrush
That’s her prize for winning the Prize x)

Calliope Quill
... In any case. I finished the newest chapter of The Last Monster in time
chapter of The Last Monster. In time you can now read it on the forum if you're interested.

**KangarooBrush**

Nice! I'll try to read it tonight when I can. But for now I'll have to leave it.

**KangarooBrush is now offline [14:41:03]**

**CoolSkeleton03**

Sorry Isabel, I still have to read the three first haha

Your chapters are so long it takes me to read them...

— **blueberry11 has just fallen into this conversation**

You're new to Temmie Village Forum's main aren'tcha? You must be so confused. The # channel will teach you how things work around here.

**blueberry11 is now online [14:41:29]**

**blueberry11**

Hi everyone!!!

**CoolSkeleton03**

Oh hi! I think I recognize the avatar. You're one of the TYF members from last month, right?

Sorry every time there's a new patch
game there’s a huge wave of new members

**blueberry11**

yee = ^.^ =

oh i see you were talking about fanfic. Which is great because i wanted to post mine too! first ever fanfic on the forum today! excited!!!

**Yoshua**

Hey that’s great! You probably must have heard of our Official Fanfic Review Committee, more like Official Fanfic Destroy Committee. Come on Calliope, say hi to your new apprentice! 🧙

**Calliope Quill**

...

"Greetings."

**Yoshua**

Aw, she’s being shy 8D
Looks like you’ll make it out alive after all, hehehehe

**blueberry11**

uuuuuuuuu??????? q-q

**Yoshua**

Don’t worry, I’m just joking with you.
Noobies tend to scare her :p

**Calliope Quill**
You do know I can also "kick" you when you least expect it, Jocelyn.

**Yoshua**
Psh, you really have to develop a sense of humor one of these days xD
Remember that half the flavor text for this game is made of jokes and puns!!

Chara loves puns and that's canon, why do you like it or not :p

**Calliope Quill**
The Charaator theory was never confirmed.

**Yoshua**
DUH, between "99% canon due to the amount of evidence" or "explicitly Of-God confirmed", you're practically the only one who still sees a difference.
ANYWAY! So, dear new padawan, what's your fanfic about? :p

**blueberry11**
Oh! Right!!!
Uh I think I need some time before I write a summary cause I don't wanna butcher in the meantime what's your favorite
AU? ^.^

Calliope Quill

... 

* Calliope Quill was kicked by Calliope Quill [14:47:58]

Yoshua

... Oooommmoom boy XD
Wait just a bit, I'll get her back :) 
no worry, it's not your fault, you didn't XD

* WinDows Gulim is now online [14:48:05]

blueberry11

???? oki???? :(

WinDows Gulim

Well Lys isn't answering my PMs for so...

Hi there! It's your first time on the game I think, right?

blueberry11

ye

but what's wrong with calliope quick say something wrong???

WinDows Gulim

Just don't worry about it, it's nothing....
against you personally x)

**Joshua**

She’ll come back in a few seconds now. No worries :p

**Calliope Quill is now online [14:49:59]**

**Joshua**

Come on now, Calliope. Just like we practiced =)

**Calliope Quill**

...

Which ”AU” is your fanfiction about?

**CoolSkeleton03 is now offline [14:50:43]**

the message: ”Sorry dudes it’s LoL time!”

**blueberry11**

Oh oh oh!!!

It’s an AU I created actually!!

**Joshua**

Oooh, even better!! :D

**blueberry11**

ye!!! It’s called UnderShwift ^ w ^

**Calliope Quill**

You’re enjoying this way too much, :D

**Joshua**
* Yoshua is preparing a L0000000000000T of funny jokes. John came, too. They feel like they're about to have a GREAT time.

Calliope Quill

... First of all, "UnderShwift"? Shwi says nothing, not even a word.

blueberry11

it’s because it’s a mix between Storc and UnderSwap... :(

but then Sans has to travel through another world because of the Resets and he’s trying to find a solution and he asks help to AVs but he doesn’t realize that by doing so that he’s enraged Error Sans and now he is in danger!!!

* Yoshua would PAY to get a picture of Calliope Quill’s face rn lmao

* Yoshua was kicked by Calliope Quill [14:58]

blueberry11

??? T-T

* Yoshua is now online [14:54:23]
Calliope Quill

Alright. You’re new here, and your description in the forum shows you’re eleven years old, so I’ll give you the benefit of attributing this to an onset of the youth. So, please listen very closely.

calliopequill

uuuuuuuh ok? ^^'

Calliope Quill

As you may have noticed by now, I am intolerant of "AUs", but there is a rational and sound reason behind this behavior. The reason is, we all love Undertale! Why would people create entirely new universes that aren’t original, but completely abolish the meaning and significance of the canon characters as well? The only kind of "AUs" I would tolerate are the ones that find their source directly from the canon, but diverge from it because of a "what if" scenario. And Undertale, the only one I could think of right now is "What if Gaster’s inci
But since we don’t know anything whatsoever about Gaster or his whereabouts anyway, such fanfiction never come even close to canon, which it pointless and utterly ridiculous either way.

**Yoshua**

Actually, that’s the point in a fanfiction, right? x)

You create a story. Your own personal story. If it’s not canon then it just make it more personal and more related. And no matter how hard you try Calliope your fanfics are never going to be either.

So it’s literally the pot calling the kettle black.

**Calliope Quill**

Maybe, but you don’t need to recreate the whole universe just for that! Why don’t see yourself as an Undertale fan if you’re writing has nothing to do with original?
* BigWinner~Professor4LpLyPpEr is now online [14:57:39]*

BigWinner~Professor4LpLyPpEr
she's not at home
she's not at home
... fuck

Windows Gulim
Wrong chat, Lys

Joshua
Wait what?
What do you mean are you talking about
Dawn?!

blueberry11
???????????? WHO??????????

Windows Gulim
Ok on a scale from one to ten how serious is this?

BigWinner~Professor4LpLyPpEr
SIXTY
STEVEN HER PARENTS CALLED THE POLICE
WHERE THE FUCK DID SHE GO
WHAT DO I DO

Joshua
Whoa Lys calm down!! o_o
Joss is right, you need to stop panicking. I can’t do much from where I am, but I think the situation? She just **LEFT**.

**blueberry11**

0________________0

**bIgWiInEr~pRoFeSSIoNaLpLuPpEr**

I don’t know! She’s just **GONE**.

When I saw her room her PC was just on the desk with Undertale on it!

Her chair and some stuff around were left, but THAT’S IT!

Charlie said he heard weird noises at night, but nobody saw her leave the building. She didn’t jump out the window, did she?

**blueberry11**

What is happening?????????

---

**blueberry11** was **banned by Calliope Quill** for 30 min [14:59:01]

**Yoshua**

Isabel what the heck?!

**Calliope Quill**

I apologize. I assumed we needed so
I apologize. I assumed we needed some privacy for this.

bIGWiNNEr~pRoFeSSIoNaLpLuuPPeR

I hadn’t realized she was THAT angry. I didn’t think she’d take that so seriously.

Oh my god, guys is this my fault? Did I make a mistake by telling her to play?

THIS WAS JUST A GAME COME ON WHAT IS GOING ON WHY DID SHE DO THAT?!

Calliope Quill

Doppler, you need to stay focused. If this is so serious, we need to know what happened. When did you last hear from her?

Do you know any places she could have gone to? Maybe we can find her fast enough. She left the chat less than an hour ago. It can’t be too far.

bIGWiNNEr~pRoFeSSIoNaLpLuuPPeR

What the FUCK Are you being serious now?

THIS IS NOT ONE OF YOUR SLUSHY FANTASY THRILLERS, QUILL!

WinDows GuliM

Lys, calm down! I know you’re tense. We’re just trying to help!

Calliope Quill
Calliope Quill

You DO know that both my father and mother work in the Virginia State Police, Pennsylvania isn’t our jurisdiction, they legally can’t do anything for me. I can always ask them for advice on how to handle the situation.

bIgwInnEr~pRoFeSSsIoNaLPuPpEr

WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I WANT TO LISTEN TO YOU WHEN DAWY COULD BE ANYWHERE RIGHT NOW.

Yoshua

Lys what the fuck?? o_o

*bIgwInnEr~pRoFeSSsIoNaLPuPpEr* was banned from *Windows Gulim* for 24 hours.

Calliope Quill

Good thinking, Steven. Hopefully her timeout will let her cool down and think more rationally for the rest...
* Calliope Quill was banned by WinDows Gulim
  duration of: 24 h [15:00:57]

* WinDows Gulim is now offline [15:00:59]

  Joshua
  Oh God

* Joshua is now offline [15:01:36]

  —— This chatroom is empty ——

* Jerry. is now online [18:55:23]

  Jerry.
  Hey guys! What did I miss? Did Dawn her first run?
  ... WHAT THE HELL STEVEN???
Can You Really Call This TVF’s Official Server I Didn’t See Any Temmies Or Anything

— Sunday, May 1, 2016 —

@Yoshua: Guys, did any of you hear about Harlonkie's last twitch event?

@Yoshua: The one where he does some sort of weird magic trick for no reason and then nobody hears from him again so he just lets us try to figure out what happened? :/

@CoolSkeleton03: Dude

@CoolSkeleton03: That happened like forever ago right?

@CoolSkeleton03: Personally i never watched him but uh

@CoolSkeleton03: Whatever if he wants to get some attention by doing the creepy mysterious stunt and making hiself victim of some sort of cheap creepypasta what do you want me to say

@CoolSkeleton03: Are people still talking about it???

@Yoshua: I don't know, my tumblr dash is still clogged with some theories and stuff about it every now and then

@Yoshua: and when I did some research about what that was about it looked like a serious thing

* BlueDoppler is now online [13:52:33]

@Yoshua: Oh hey Lys!

@Yoshua: By any chance, do you know some stuff about Harlonkie's "ghost livestream" that was never recorded or uploaded?

@BlueDoppler: Hahaha

@BlueDoppler: HAAHAHA!

@Yoshua: uh

@CoolSkeleton03: ?

* KangarooBrush is now online [13:53:02]

@Yoshua: ok

@KangarooBrush: Hello to you too, Lys :)

@Calliope Quill: Oh, there we go.

@BlueDoppler: Guys, I did it!

@BlueDoppler: I finally DID IT!!

* WinDows Gulim is now online [13:54:13]
@Calliope Quill: Doppler is finally divulging to the wide world the dormant mad scientist who dwells threateningly in the meanderings of her mind, uh?

@KangarooBrush: Isabel, please...

@BlueDoppler: Oh shut up already, Quill. Not now.

@BlueDoppler: This moment is too perfect and I CERTAINLY don't want you to ruin it.

@WinDows Gulim: What's the matter, Lys?

@CoolSkeleton03: Just 2 mins in and i already have no idea what's going on anymore

@CoolSkeleton03: Like wow

@BlueDoppler: This is FINALLY happening, guys. I'm not even kidding.

@Calliope Quill: Now I'm the lost one. What have we been apparently "hyping" for exactly?

@BlueDoppler: Dawn. She's finally doing it.

@Yoshua: OMG

@CoolSkeleton03: Whaaaaaat?

@WinDows Gulim: Noo... Really?

@Calliope Quill: Still in the dark here.

@WinDows Gulim: Oh Glob, I'm so proud of you right now. How did you do it?

@BlueDoppler: Sometimes blackmail is for the greater good =)

@KangarooBrush: Aaw, geez... :'

@BlueDoppler: And now she HAS to play it \o/

@Yoshua: ON LIVESTREAM!

@Yoshua: I WANNA SEE THIS OMG

@Calliope Quill: ... Right. The "Plup Game."

@Calliope Quill: Ooh boy.

@Yoshua: LET'S START THE CALL RIGHT NOW!

@WinDows Gulim: Yosh, she's not even online yet... :'

@Yoshua: THEN WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR??? LYS JUST BRING HER ALREADY!

@Yoshua: ... You're in her house now, right? o3o

@BlueDoppler: Nah, we just had lunch together. I'm back home with my laptop now.

@BlueDoppler: But I expect her to login in... Maybe a few more minutes?
@Pineapplup: Guess again, Lys. I was stalking.

@Yoshua: YUIFDRTDKJBVFJGH

@BlueDoppler: ... Oh.

@Pineapplup: And I REALLY want you to give it back as soon as this is over. I'm counting on you.

@Yoshua: A WILD PIPLUP APPEARED!!!

@BlueDoppler: Don't worry Dawn, it's safe.

@BlueDoppler: C'mon, you can trust me! I'll take good care of it [Winking Sans Emoji]

@Pineapplup: That's exactly what I'm afraid of...

@WinDows Gulim: It's alright P. She'll give back... whatever it is she took from you.

@Pineapplup: Yeah yeah, whatever.

@Pineapplup: Btw, hi Joystick.

@Yoshua: HIIIIIIII

@Yoshua: SO ARE YOU DOING THAT LIVESTREAM OR NOT??? :DDD

@Pineapplup: ... °sigh°

@Pineapplup: I guess I don't have a choice uh.

@Yoshua: no u don't [Excited Onionsan Emoji]

@Pineapplup: ...

@Pineapplup: welp

@Pineapplup: Lys, do you mind if I use your Steam account and reset your game?

@BlueDoppler: You know I don't :p

@Pineapplup: heh

@Pineapplup: I hate yall. Cant believe youd betray me like this.

@Pineapplup: but eh why the heck not

@Pineapplup: Well, I'll see you guys in a few minutes I guess. In the meantime you can prepare the popcorn or whatever

@Yoshua: eeeeeeee I can't wait!!! ❤

@Calliope Quill: Well, I'll be off and leave you to... whatever it is you're about to do.

@Calliope Quill: For my part there's still a chapter I'd like to finish today.

@CoolSkeleton03: Oh nice!! Will you review my fanfic too when ur done?
@Calliope Quill: ...

@Calliope Quill: No.

@Calliope Quill: I was about to type a sarcastic comment about the relevance of your writing style, but then I realized it probably wasn't worth the effort.

@Yoshua: Duh. Not everyone types in chatrooms the same way they write novels, Dickens.

@Yoshua: Especially when they're on their phone lmao

*Calliope Quill is now offline [14:01:52]*

@WinDows Gulim: Agreed. Phone keyboards are the worst <_<

@Yoshua: btw I LOVE how your story is going so far Arty. I really think it's great!! Don't let the grinch make you think otherwise [Smug Undyne Emoji]

@Yoshua: ... fuck

@BlueDoppler: I didn't know you were a Genocider, Jocelyn 8D

@Yoshua: DANG IT WHY

@Yoshua: Forget about the red. I meant it in the REAL way, of course xD

@Yoshua: I always forget how the bold and italics options change the color of the font instead of ACTUALLY making it bold or italics here. How did you even do that WDG?

@WinDows Gulim: Ehhh, I have my ways ;)

@CoolSkeleton03: haha thanks yosh

@CoolSkeleton03: you didn't think the megalovania part was too much?

@BlueDoppler: Eh, don't worry about it.

@BlueDoppler: You know how it works with fanfics...

@BlueDoppler: No matter what happens, you can always find worse than you [Laughing Undyne Emoji]

@BlueDoppler: (Case in point with Quill lmao)

@KangarooBrush: Um, Lys, no offense, but Isabel is definitely the best writer I've ever seen x')

@BlueDoppler: Well it's not that she's a bad writer. What I mean is that her FANFICS are terrible.

@BlueDoppler: I mean ok she writes like if she was the reincarnation of Tolkien or something.

@BlueDoppler: BUT.

@BlueDoppler: Have you just. READ her stuff?

@KangarooBrush: Of course I have. It was some excellent work [Confused Toriel Emoji]

@BlueDoppler: It's well written, ok.
@BlueDoppler: But she's so attached to the canon, she rejects ANYTHING that isn't 100% confirmed to be in the game.

@BlueDoppler: When you limit yourself so much, how can you make your story interesting? If there's literally no surprises EVER? No secrets? No imagination from HER?

@Yoshua: Haha, good point

@BlueDoppler: Okay she writes wonderfully and she knows how to make ANYTHING sound badass when she writes about it, but...

@BlueDoppler: Her stories are just so boring when you can always see from a mile away what's going to happen :v

@BlueDoppler: By now her writing only makes me snore honestly. At least if she's going to write something and EVERYONE knows how it's gonna end, can't she make it SHORT?

@CoolSkeleton03: [Shocked Undyne Emoji]

@CoolSkeleton03: all hail to the one who could review calliope's fanfics lmao

@BlueDoppler: HAHAHA BOW BEFORE YOUR FANFICTION MASTER MY PRECIOUS SLAVES [Bloodthirsty Flowey Emoji]

@BlueDoppler: xD Seriously though someone really needs to get her off her high horse one of these days

@Yoshua: She brags so much about how writing stuff can only be done her way or else it has to be crap lol

@Yoshua: You think she's trying to compensate on some other thing she's lacking? ;p

@KangarooBrush: Enough you two, please leave her alone with this... If you want to discuss that kind of problems, then talk about it in private. And definitely not behind Isabel's back.

@Yoshua: ... yes ma'am

@KangarooBrush: Anyway... Don't you think it's been a while since Dawn's last message? How's her run going?

@BlueDoppler: ... true [Awkward Alphys Emoji] It must've been at least ten minutes by now...?

@Yoshua: Hey, she's not bailing out NOW is she?[Disapproving Toriel Emoji]

@Yoshua: HEY @Pineapplup YOU"RE NOT GETTING AWAY THAT EASILY I WANT MY STREAM

@BlueDoppler: I don't know, I don't think she would just stand up like that...

@BlueDoppler: She seemed really attached to that music sheet I found :o It looked like she was feeling embarrassed about it so I guess she composed it, but I can't read shit on musical stuff so it's not like I could understand what's wrong with it lmao

@BlueDoppler: But don't worry, I'm sure she's fine.

@CoolSkeleton03: She's dead [Jumpscare Chara Emoji]
@BlueDoppler: She did look pretty mad an hour ago, so maybe she just F4'd and now that the game's on full screen she forgot everything that's going on around it? idk

@BlueDoppler: You know how she gets when she's deep into something u_u

@BlueDoppler: The rest of the world just "magically disappears" and there's nothing you can do to get her out except smack her in the back of her head or whatever

@WinDows Gulim: At this point I wonder if she'll be the first one to prove that it's possible to die during Flowey's first fight or something like that... [Thinking Papyrus Emoji]

@CoolSkeleton03: No but seriously you think she's past Toriel yet? XD

@KangarooBrush: Getting past Toriel isn't the biggest problem if her health is lowered down to 2 HP within the first few turns x) I'm more concerned about the rest of the Ruins honestly

@KangarooBrush: If she finds a Vegetoid she might get into a bit more trouble...

@CoolSkeleton03: Pff at this point even the first froggit will kill her lmao

@Yoshua: Oh my GOD guys, have some faith in her dammit!

@BlueDoppler: Heh. I don't know, Jocelyn...

@BlueDoppler: Dawn and I have been childhood friends since third grade. You know how rational and all "sciencey" I get all the time, right? But when I tell you that Dawn is literally CURSED by videogames, maybe I'm joking, but it's always been THAT bad.

@BlueDoppler: I don't know how she does it but she just always finds some sort of way to literally break the game. SOMEHOW.

@BlueDoppler: I mean, why did YOU think making her play Undertale was that much of a big deal? :p

@Yoshua: Excuse me what

@BlueDoppler: I can't believe you joined the Plup Game without knowing what it was REALLY about XD

@Yoshua: Hey come on, you know me! I just roll with the flow xD

@Yoshua: And since it was a joke with Dawn at the center of course I couldn't just NOT join lmao

@CoolSkeleton03: Pff ok I know Dawn always says she sucks at video games and that she's so bad there should be an award for that but a CURSE??!? lol

@KangarooBrush: I'll admit I don't remember this thing about a curse either... But I guess that if YOU are saying this, then you already have evidence stacked up in order to prove your point? :p

@BlueDoppler: Oh you have no idea, my case is FULL of it.

@BlueDoppler: Here's a random anecdote: there was that time when she was playing Pokemon Platinum and she found a freaking SHINY ABSOL on the FIRST TRY. It was hailing so she had to be extra careful not to faint it and all, so she just decided to try to give it a status condition that'd make it easier to catch and then wait patiently for the hail to weaken it.
@BlueDoppler: So during the first turn, she just paralyzed it, and then the plan was to just keep switching out until it was close to the red.

@BlueDoppler: But that's when things got insane. Because it was the wild Absol's turn.

@CoolSkeleton03: Ok now you have to tell us xD

@WinDows Gulim: A shiny absol? Now I don't think you told me that one but it HAD to be gold :')

@BlueDoppler: Right on the first turn, the wild Absol uses Pursuit. There's not much effect.

@BlueDoppler: The hail hurts both Pokemon on the field.

@BlueDoppler: Dawn decides to switch out.

@BlueDoppler: The wild Absol uses Pursuit again. The switch occurs.

@BlueDoppler: And then that's when the festival begins.

@BlueDoppler: Rain continues to fall. The sandstorm rages. The sunlight is strong. Hail falls too.

@BlueDoppler: Each Pokemon is somehow hurt EVERY TIME by their ABILITIES.

@BlueDoppler: Both Pokemon faint.

@BlueDoppler: The end.

@Yoshua: but

@Yoshua: how did she

@WinDows Gulim: That was even better than I expected x'D

@Yoshua: what the fuck???

@KangarooBrush: ...

@KangarooBrush: Oh my.

* Yoshua needs to reboot her brain.

@CoolSkeleton03: Press f to pay respects to the kamikaze shiny absol

@Yoshua: f

@BlueDoppler: Later on I heard about that "acid rain glitch", but wherever I looked people were adamant that the glitch was only supposed to activate when it was the PLAYER who used the Pursuit move, so if it was the wild Pokemon then it wasn't supposed to happen.

@BlueDoppler: (f yes you should've seen our faces back then OOF xD)

@BlueDoppler: ... Besides, the damage wasn't supposed to be that strong, at least not nearly strong enough to get an OHKO out of both Pokemon in just one turn.

@BlueDoppler: So, my conclusion is, "???
@WinDows Gulim: I think I heard about it a few years ago, yeah. Apparently it affected the HGSS games too. But it's true that this case looks weird... I wish I could look into it more.

@KangarooBrush: f

@WinDows Gulim: Then again, what ELSE is new with all the experiments you led that involved Dawn and video games being in the same room? [Fake Smile Burgerpants Emoji]

@BlueDoppler: I know, right? XD

@BlueDoppler: Anyway, I won't tell every single story separately, but long story short, Dawn has a record of LITERALLY breaking every single videogame she comes across, and nobody knows how she does it, ESPECIALLY NOT HERSELF.

@KangarooBrush: This is concerning... but hilariously fascinating x'D

@BlueDoppler: The most common way she does it is that she activates glitches in the game that nobody knew about, or ones that are known to be insanely hard to accomplish... And still somehow she manages to do that completely by accident half the time xD

* Yoshua has uploaded an image. [14:21:52]

@Joshua:

@Joshua: sorry i had to

@BlueDoppler: ...

@CoolSkeleton03: Haha oh shit this is too powerful
@KangarooBrush: oh boy :'D

@BlueDoppler: Joss this is somehow perfect and yet I still hate you

@BlueDoppler: But this is still perfect

@WinDows Gulim: Welp, I can't believe I didn't see THAT one coming. Congrats on doing it so fast Joss :')

@WinDows Gulim: Your drawing skills are actually getting pretty good now o:

@Yoshua: Haha, tanks xD Guess it's just years of experience in shitposting 8D

@BlueDoppler: Anyway... Back to the point, if you allow me ;p

@BlueDoppler: NOW, do you have ANY IDEA what could happen if we tried this with UNDERTALE? [Insane Omega Flowey Emoji]

@Yoshua: ... Oh my God she's so screwed.

@BlueDoppler: I tried to warn you `\_(verty)\_/`

@BlueDoppler: Then again, ok, I still have to admit she's been improving. I recently tried to train her with some random rhythm game, because who's Dawn without her passion and amazing skills in music, RIGHT?

@BlueDoppler: And uh. After a week she managed to actually finish the first level?

@BlueDoppler: Hey, at least she even taught me something in the end.

@BlueDoppler: On that day I learned that the rank "G" somehow EXISTS on that game???

@WinDows Gulim: Oooh right, that one x'D

@WinDows Gulim: The infamous "Backwards Secret Rank for Goobers" 8D

@Yoshua: PFFFFFT XD

@Yoshua: Who wants to bet she'll get that glitch where Sans walks out of the screen? x) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVyhRfDXGxQ

@Yoshua: Still, it's too bad... I wish we could see her progress _.

* Jerry. is now online [14:26:19]

@KangarooBrush: Oh, hello!

@Jerry.: Hi folks! What's up?

@WinDows Gulim: You won't believe what happened.

@WinDows Gulim: Dawn is playing Undertale!

@Jerry.: ...

@Jerry.: DUDE. YOU'RE NOT SERIOUS.
@BlueDoppler: THIS IS 100% SERIOUS

@BlueDoppler: ... Well we don't get to see her play for now, but I'm sure she'll have some stuff to say later :p

@Jerry.: Ugh... I wish I could've been the one, I was working on a plan to make her play too!

@Jerry.: Oh well. Who's the lucky winner?

@BlueDoppler: This girl right here [Proud Papyrus Emoji]

@BlueDoppler: What was the prize again? I think we talked about a special rank at some point

@BlueDoppler: Oh and you all owe me a UT gift for the ConnectiCon meeting. I want my merch =)

@Jerry.: There, done

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: Oh, you mean the rank?

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: ...

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: DANG IT LEE

@Jerry.: [Omega Flowey Troll Emoji]

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: HOW DID YOU EVEN MANAGE TO MAKE AN ABSOLUTE GOD OF HYPERDEATH RANK XD

@WinDows Gulim: Pfft, nice one xD

@KangarooBrush: Oh come on x)

@Jerry.: x)

@Jerry.: Wait Steven

@Jerry.: You're STILL online? It's like 7:28 pm here, doesn't that mean it's literally the middle of the night for you?

@Jerry.: I swear you're online more and more often at the US time now

@Jerry.: Doesn't that mean you're online at very weird hours for the Australian time?

@WinDows Gulim: Ehhh, it's just a habit of getting up early and going to bed even earlier by now x)

@CoolSkeleton03: What time is it in australia rn?

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: 4:29 am

@WinDows Gulim: 4:29

@WinDows Gulim: wait what

@Yoshua: HAHAHA GOOD JORB LYS
@CoolSkeleton03: Wait a sec how did you know the answer so fast? You're not from australia too, are you? :o

@Yoshua: of course not Artie!! xD

@Yoshua: you kno Dawn and Lys live in Peensylvania

@Yoshua: (wait am i typin it right???)

@Jerry.: It's "Pennsylvania." And John, did you steal your sister's phone again? :p

@Yoshua: nah not dis time

@Yoshua: but with only 1 comp at home how do u want us to b online at the same time if she takes over the home pc

@Jerry.: Haha, good point x)

@Yoshua: Joss is in the bathroom rn so i dont think shed care if i take her place for a bit lol

@CoolSkeleton03: Seriously i'm still confused how did you do that Lys? You answered in like 5s top???

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: I just have very good reflexes :p

@Yoshua: haha ye SURE

@Yoshua: i bet it has somethin to do with the 2nd watch u wear on ur RIGHT wrist ;) ;) ;)

@WinDows Gulim: ... You wear two watches Lys? _._

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: SHUT UP WHO CARES ABOUT MY FASHION SENSE

@Yoshua: aw it has nuthin to do with fashion hun ;p

@Yoshua: everybody knos what u 2 shoud do except urselves u dorks

@Jerry.: (shit it's already time for my evening shift)

@Jerry.: see you guys later!

* Jerry. is now offline [14:30:59]

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: John don't you dare

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: ... WAIT LEE AM I GOING TO KEEP THAT RANK FOREVER NOW IS THAT A REAL THING???

@Yoshua: ❤ * Flirt

* Yoshua was kicked by [BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr [14:31:28]

@WinDows Gulim: Whoa hey, calm down Lys :')

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: Come on, he deserved it xD
@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: ... But yeah, sorry, I guess I AM getting a little tense rn. I'm still thinking about Dawn.

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: It's been more than half an hour by now, right? What IS she doing???

* Yoshua is now online [14:32:49]

@Yoshua: Hey yall I'm back

@Yoshua: And don't worry Lys, John got some noogies in revenge :p

@Yoshua: It's weird yeah, I sent Dawn some texts but she doesn't answer them either...

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: SHIT WHAT THE HELL

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: gotta go

@Yoshua: ?????????????

@Yoshua: Lyyyyys?

@Yoshua: What did I miss? D:

* [BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr is now offline [14:33:13]

@Yoshua: uuuuuuuuh thanks for explaining what's going on???

@WinDows Gulim: Uh oh, this looks serious...

@Yoshua: Steven, she probably sent you a PM about it, right?

@WinDows Gulim: Nope :/

* WinDows Gulim is now offline [14:33:58]

* Calliope Quill is now online [14:34:04]

@Yoshua: BWAHAHA OH NOW I SEE WHAT IT IS XD

@Yoshua: CALLIOPE NOW LYS HATES YOU SO MUCH SHE CAN SENSE WHEN YOU"RE ABOUT TO ARRIVE LMAO

@Calliope Quill: ... Can somebody explain what really happened?

@Yoshua: Nobody knows but your timing was perfect XD

@Calliope Quill: Why does Doppler have...? Actually, I'm not even going to ask.

@KangarooBrush: That's her prize for winning the Plup Game x)

@Calliope Quill: ... In any case. I finished the newest chapter of The Last Monster in time, you can now read it on the forum if you're interested.
@KangarooBrush: Nice! I'll try to read it tonight whenever I can. But for now I'll have to leave too... ^^'

* KangarooBrush is now offline [14:41:03]

@CoolSkeleton03: Sorry Isabel, I still have to read the last three first haha

@CoolSkeleton03: Your chapters are so long it takes a while to read them...

—— blueberry11 has just fallen into this chat! ——

You're new to Temmie Village Forum's main server, aren'tcha? You must be so confused. The #rules channel will teach you how things work around here!

* blueberry11 is now online [14:41:29]

@blueberry11: Hi everyone!!!

@CoolSkeleton03: Oh hi! I think I recognize the avatar... You're one of the TVF members from last month, right?

@CoolSkeleton03: Sorry every time there's a new patch on the game there's a huge wave of new members x)

@blueberry11: yee = ^ . ^ =

@blueberry11: oh i see you were talking about fanfics!!

@blueberry11: Which is great because i wanted to post my first ever fanfic on the forum today i'm so excited!!!

@Yoshua: Hey that's great! You probably must've heard of our Official Fanfic Reviewer, haha

@Yoshua: more like Official Fanfic Destroyer LMAO

@Yoshua: Come on Calliope, say hi to your new apprentice! [Winking Flowey Emoji]

@Calliope Quill: ...

@Calliope Quill: "Greetings."

@Yoshua: Aw, she's being shy 8D

@Yoshua: Looks like you'll make it out alive after all, heheheh

@blueberry11: uuuuuuuu?????? q-q

@Yoshua: Don't worry, I'm just joking with you. Noobies tend to scare her :p

@Calliope Quill: You do know I can also "kick" you whenever I want, Jocelyn.

@Yoshua: Psh, you really have to develop a sense of humor one of these days xD

@Yoshua: Remember that half the flavor text in the game is made of jokes and puns!!

@Yoshua: Chara loves puns and that's canon, whether you like it or not :p
@Calliope Quill: The character theory was never confirmed.

@Yoshua: DUH, between "99% canon due to the insane amount of evidence" or "explicitly Word-Of-God confirmed", you're practically the only one who still sees a difference :/

@Yoshua: ANYWAY! So, dear new padawan, what's your fanfic about? :p

@blueberry11: oh! Right!!!

@blueberry11: Uh I think I need some time before I can write a summary cause I don't wanna spoil!

@blueberry11: but in the meantime what's your favorite AU? ^ . ^

@Calliope Quill: ...

* Calliope Quill was kicked by Calliope Quill [14:47:58]

@Yoshua: ... Ooooooooh boy XD

@Yoshua: Wait just a bit, I'll get her back :) Don't worry, it's not your fault, you didn't know XD

* WinDows Gulim is now online [14:48:05]

@blueberry11: ???? oki???? :(

@WinDows Gulim: Well Lys isn't answering my PMs for now, so...

@WinDows Gulim: Hi there! It's your first time on the server I think, right?

@blueberry11: ye

@blueberry11: but what's wrong with calliope quilil did i say something wrong???

@WinDows Gulim: Just don't worry about it, it's nothing against you personally x)

@Yoshua: She'll come back in a few seconds no worries :p

* Calliope Quill is now online [14:49:59]

@Yoshua: Come on now, Calliope. Just like we practiced =)

@Calliope Quill: ...

@Calliope Quill: Which "AU" is your fanfiction about?

* CoolSkeleton03 is now offline [14:50:43] and left the message: "Sorry dudes it's LoL time!"

@blueberry11: Oh oh oh!!!

@blueberry11: It's an AU I created actually!!

@Yoshua: Oooh, even better!! :D

@blueberry11: ye!!! It's called UnderShwift ^ w ^

@Calliope Quill: You're enjoying this way too much, Jocelyn.
@Yoshua: I AM AND I WON'T HIDE IT THIS IS TOO GLORIOUS XD

* **Yoshua** is preparing a LOOOOOOOOOOOOOT of popcorn. John came, too. They feel like they're about to have a GREAT time.

@Calliope Quill: ...

@Calliope Quill: First of all, "UnderShwift"? "Shwift" is not even a word.

@blueberry11: it's because it's a mix between Storyshift and UnderSwap... :(

@blueberry11: but then Sans has to travel through AUs because of the Resets and he's trying to find a solution and he asks help to other AUs but he doesn't realize that by doing that he's enraged Error Sans and now his AU is in danger!!!

* **Yoshua** would PAY to get a picture of Calliope's face rn lmao

* Yoshua was kicked by Calliope Quill [14:54:14]

@blueberry11: ??? T-T

* Yoshua is now online [14:54:23]

@Calliope Quill: Alright. You're new here, and your description in the forum shows you're only eleven years old, so I'll give you the benefit of attributing this to an error of the youth.

@Calliope Quill: So, please listen very closely.

@blueberry11: uuuuuuh ok? ^ ^'

@Calliope Quill: As you may have noticed by now, I am pretty intolerant of "AUs", but there is a very rational and sound reason behind this behavior. The reason is, we all love Undertale!

@Calliope Quill: Why would people create entirely new universes that aren't original, but that completely abolish the meaning and depth of the canon characters as well?

@Calliope Quill: The only kind of "AUs" I would tolerate are the ones that find their source directly from the canon, but diverge from it only because of a "what if" scenario. And in Undertale, the only one I could think of right now is "What if Gaster's incident never occurred?", for example.

@Calliope Quill: But since we don't know anything whatsoever about Gaster or his incident's whereabouts anyway, such fanfiction could never come even close to canon, which makes it pointless and utterly ridiculous either way.

@Yoshua: Actually, that's the point in a fanfiction, right? x)

@Yoshua: You create a story. Your own personal story. If it's not canon then it just makes it more personal and more related to you!

@Yoshua: And no matter how hard you try Calliope, your fanfics are never going to be canon either

@Yoshua: So it's literally the pot calling the kettle black [Omega Flowey Troll Emoji]

@Calliope Quill: Maybe, but you don't need to recreate the whole universe just for that! Why do you see yourself as an Undertale fan if what you're writing has nothing to do with the original?
* [BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr is now online [14:57:39]

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: she's nOT AT HOME

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: SHE'S NOT AT HOME

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: ... FUCK

@WinDows Gulim: Wrong chat, Lys

@Yoshua: Wait what?

@Yoshua: What do you mean are you talking about Dawn?!

@blueberry11: ????????? WHO????????

@WinDows Gulim: Ok on a scale from one to ten how serious is this?

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: SIXTY

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: STEVEN HER PARENTS CALLED THE POLICE

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: WHERE THE FUCK DID SHE GO

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: WHAT DO I DO

@Yoshua: Whoa Lys calm down!! o_o

@WinDows Gulim: Joss is right, you need to stop panicking D:

@WinDows Gulim: I can't do much from where I am, but how's the situation? She just LEFT?

@blueberry11: O________________O

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: I don't know! She's just GONE

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: When I saw her room her PC was just open on her desk with Undertale on it!

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: Her chair and some stuff around were on the floor, but THAT'S. IT!

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: Charlie said he heard weird noises at some point but nobody saw her leave the room!

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: She didn't jump out the window, did she?!

@blueberry11: what is happening????????

* blueberry11 was banned by Calliope Quill for a duration of: 30 min [14:59:01]

@Yoshua: Isabel what the heck?!

@Calliope Quill: I apologize. I assumed we needed some privacy for this.

@[BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: I hand't realized she was THAT angry!
@BlueDoppler bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: I didn't think she'd take that so seriously.

@BlueDoppler bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: Oh my god buys is this my fault?

@BlueDoppler bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: did i make a mistake by telling her to play?

@BlueDoppler bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: THIS WAS JUST A GAME COME ON WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON WHY DID SHE DO THAT?!

@Calliope Quill: Doppler, you need to stay focused.

@Calliope Quill: If this is so serious, we need to know what happened. When did you last hear from her?

@Calliope Quill: Do you know any places she could have gone to? Maybe we can find her fast enough.

@Calliope Quill: She left the chat less than an hour ago, she can't be too far.

@BlueDoppler bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: What the FUCK Are you being serious right now?

@BlueDoppler bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: THIS IS NOT ONE OF YOUR SLUSHY FANFICTION THRILLERS, QUILL!

@WinDows Gulim: Lys, calm down! I know you're tense but we're just trying to help!

@Calliope Quill: You DO know that both my father and Sally work in the Virginia State Police, right? Pennsylvania isn't our jurisdiction so they legally can't do anything for now, but I can always ask them for advice on how to handle the situation.

@BlueDoppler bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr: WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I WANT TO LISTEN TO YOU WHEN DAWY COULD BE ANYWHERE RIGHT NOW

@Yoshua: Lys what the fuck??? o_o

* [BlueDoppler] bIgWiNnEr~pRoFeSsIoNaLpLuPpEr was banned by WinDows Gulim for a duration of: 24 h [15:00:35]

@Calliope Quill: Good thinking, Steven. Hopefully her timeout will let her cool down and think more rationally for the rest...

* Calliope Quill was banned by WinDows Gulim for a duration of: 24 h [15:00:57]

* WinDows Gulim is now offline [15:00:59]

@Yoshua: Oh God

* Yoshua is now offline [15:01:36]

* Jerry. is now online [18:55:23]

——— This chatroom is empty ———
@Jerry.: Hey guys! What did I miss? Did Dawn finish her first run?

@Jerry.: ... WHAT THE HELL STEVEN???

Read via Screenshots Here (full formatting but may encounter loading issues)

Chapter End Notes

Thiiiiis is the reason why I really advise people to read the PDF version if possible. I hesitated to do the same thing even with the regular chapters, but I think that THIS type of episode really is the main reason why I just couldn't stand HTMLing everything on AO3. It's hard enough to organize on the local files, so I really wouldn't want to do that a second time here, and yet another time for every single website where this story could possibly be published Dx

In any case, I'm really sorry for the phone users, but sadly there was no other way for me to find the proper format for this chapter, and I can tell already that this won't be the only time there'll be chat logs like these. They won't make entire chapters anymore, but they still might appear from time to time whenever they are relevant.

[EDIT] AND now I see that AO3 is going to be literally the death of me and that it now deliberately wants me to suffer. What the heck is this scrolling thing?? I had no problem like this when it came to posting my GF comic so what is going on here?? o_o

Anyway I'm sorry everyone I'll try to find a way to correct this but seriously w h a t

Anyway. DANG did I wait for this chapter. I had it in mind aaaaaall the way back for the old version, but somehow it never made it there due to various reasons I guess.

Anyway. NOW it's here, and now it's going to be HEKKA RELEVANT while also being sort of an interlude/bonus chapter compared to the main story :p I hope that wasn't too many characters all at once and that it was still easy enough to follow despite everything.

[EDIT] Well, now I changed my mind and all the chapters are posted as screenshots, AND hopefully it should be readable both on computer and on mobile. It seems like the images are a bit too big on computers depending on what you're looking for, but if you change your browser to window mode and reduce the width, the images will become smaller, so you can adapt the size of the text however you want.
This chapter took forever due to a number of reasons: because I started working on a lot of chapters that will come much later in the story, because I had my finals, and because I spent two weeks working on a school project that involved me working at a lab with a team and spending eight hours per day running around and fixing stuff while talking with the professors and learning random anecdotes about their time as chemistry students.

Anyway with that being said, you'll probably understand where I pulled my inspiration from for this chapter :p

Also you may have noticed, but for the PDF files I changed the dimensions of the pages in order to make the reading experience easier, especially on mobile (for those who can read PDF files on mobile, at least). It might take some getting used to on computer, but it looks great on a phone and hopefully it's still enjoyable enough either way. AND, great news for those who can't read PDF files for one reason or another, the chapters are also available on tumblr now, as high-quality screenshots.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Learn When to Quit
— Act 1 —
Don’t Let Him Find Out

Scene 4.1

» Read the PDF version here! «
» Read on tumblr here! «

This is the main index where you can choose which way you wish to read the chapter.

Read via Screenshots Here (full formatting but may encounter loading issues)

Read Plain Text Here (formatting limited to what AO3 can do)
“Sans.” Dawn grumbled, gritting her teeth. “I get the message. So now, could you please stop singing, or I’ll get it again.”

The last notes of Megalovania turned to a dejected, almost sad tune, if only for the few seconds the skeleton needed to focus his attention towards her, shrug with a smug smile, and retort.

“What message? there’s no message. s’not my song if it’s catchy, blame the guy who made the music.”

And the singing resumed, soon accompanied with a high note of sighs coming from both girls in the room.

“Sans, for the love of the Angel, please.” Abigail pleaded, while adding her location.
“Stop.” Alphys pleaded while rubbing her tired eyes. “I haven’t had my coffee yet. It’s too early for memes.”

“pfft. weaklings.” He snorted mockingly, walking over towards the coffeemaker and flipping a switch. “here ya go. will be ready in a minute.”

He quietly made his way back to the kitchen table and found a seat beside the human teenager, watching her with amusement as she was staring angrily at her phone, tediously undoing all the damage he had caused. Monster smirked internally when he realized that she still had not noticed more than half of the jokes he had made.

When silence fell in the room (except for the purrs of the coffee machine), Sans started to weave an excuse so he could sing some more, but he was cut short when Alphys asked Dawn to play some music from her phone, to which she instantly agreed. After a few minutes of arguing, the trio reached the compromise that her phone could play some of its tracks as background music, as long as all Sans-related songs were automatically banned from the list.

Well, more precisely, this agreement was reached between the two girls, who won by default due to the rules of decision-making. Disappointment was very evident on Sans’s skull, but at the same time he probably was internally relieved.
would not have to worry about potential existences or of seeing or hearing things that would remind
He needed to see Alphys’s reaction to understanding exactly the song that was currently playing, _Fishy_ was all about. But when he did, his response was immediate.

“oh come on. why does SHE get to watch about her, and not me?”

“Sans, no offense, but contrary to your logic, I’m not the literal embodiment of myself. Alphys sighed, shaking her head pseudo-solen.

“Not to mention, your meme potential is increasing exponentially in my world. So, trust me, this is for the sake of your own mental health.” added sheepishly, but with a half-grin distorted mixture between pity and mockery.

“you do know i’ve already seen half of it, right? the skeleton deadpanned.

“Well, then you don’t need to see it again, do you?” Alphys smirked trollesquely.

Dawn and Alphys shared a synchronized snort and then high-fived.

Well, considering the fact that Alphys only has two fingers, the terminology could be up for debate.
The white rectangular phone was magically snatched from Dawn’s hands by something that had come and vanished so quickly, she hardly had time to see but a swift white blur, and after the few seconds needed to get over the shock, she raised her eyes to see that the skeleton now had it in his hands, despite the fact that he had not moved the slightest from his seat on the other side of the table. Then again, he quickly frowned angrily while staring at the screen, as he had turned it on only to be greeted with a sort of grid puzzle preventing him from doing anything.

“... huh. that’s new.” he grumbled dejectedly. The teenager smugly stood up from her seat and drifted towards him, then stopped in front of him and held up an open hand that politely invited him to give her the electronical property.

“This is what we commonly call a password. It’s meant to stop nosy people like you from messing with my files again. So, I’m sorry to announce but your little snooping around is over.”

The expression Sans returned her was only that of an impressed skeleton troll who had just been challenged by glowing pupils radiated the Smug and seemed to
“you’re underestimating me big time, bud. you’ll regret it.” His stuck-on smirk slowly expanded.

“You’re on.”

“Yeah, right. Good luck.” She rolled her eyes. “I still have to clean up a lot of stuff on it, so I’m sure you could give it back, now.”

He hesitated, but eventually sighed in defeat and let her take back her little piece of technology. If he could pout, she was certain that it was the only time he would have shown on his skull.

“Whoa hey. I see what you’re doin here.” he said in frustration when he immediately saw her looking for a new image to replace her wallpaper. “You not gonna put the old one again, are you?”

Alphys snorted. “Aw, what’s wrong with a bunch of baby bones being cuddled by the flower? You shouldn’t be jealous, you were cuter than that when you were born.”

Sans was about to say something, but the embarassment was now obvious on his skull, and he was in no mood anyway when Dawn apparently choked on air. She had some sort of mixture between a coughing fit and hysterical laughter.

“Wait, what?” The worms were in中文, but she was
"Wait, you..." The human pointed shakily towards the scientist, then the skeleton standing right next to him. "Y-you. Saw him. As a baby?" she asked in disbelief, as soon as she could somewhat control her giggles.

"I know it doesn't show, but I'm three years older than him, actually." the skeleton answered proudly while playing with her nonexistent eyebrows. "And have I SEEN him? I BEYOND these brothers, girl. We're family!"

The human gasped overdramatically, a huge grin on her face. "No Way. So you have... baby stories or something?"

Alphys's demonic smirk was slicing her entire right cheek. "You have NO idea."

"Al. Don't."

When she turned her head back towards Sans, realizing just how silent he had been until that point, Dawn was not sure what to expect. In any case, there were two very obvious observations she could make in this situation. First of all, somehow, it was indeed possible for Sans to blush. Papyrus had proven it in the game, but seeing it in real life was a huge difference between seeing it on a sprite, and seeing it on a realistic monster made of bone. And second, the fans' headcanon that Sans would...
And second, the fans’ headcanon that Sans wore cyan or blue was wrong. It was the regular color for and the exact same color as any monster blush in the game, that was to say, the most saturated red you imagine. Also, the blush was not just a color on his face, it was actually faintly glowing. His skull almost looked like one of those lightbulbs in a Christmas decoration. If not as adorable as it would have looked in a fanfiction, at the very least *hilarious* to watch live on the real

“Whatever you say, Rudolf.” Dawn smirked playfully, trying her best not to give in to laughter but not enough failing miserably.

She realized after a split second that it was very
neither Alphys nor Sans would catch on the refer-
it was too late, and when her brain made the
associating the concepts ‘blushing Sans’ and ‘Red-
Red-Nosed Reindeer’, the mental image of a glo-
in a reindeer costume was enough to make her
laughter and bury her head in her hands as emo-
tears began to appear in the corner of her eyes.
Too late. The image is here now, and it will never
The two monsters watched her in surprise and de-
but she could not see them and she certainly
currently in the physical capability of explaining
anything. When the coffee was ready and they
finally managed to calm down, her messy
finally managed to calm down, her messy, reddened face made her look at least just as ridiculous as the initial subject of her hilarity.

“Seriously though, I really need to find a better wallpaper. Hmm.”

She wiped the wetness off her eyes and tried to tidy up her hair a bit, but sadly, it appeared that sleeping along with an electricity-based lizard monster wasn’t a good idea if you wanted to be photogenic on the phone. "Well, that’s about as good as it’s ever gonna be," she mumbled in defeat, pouting. She sent a self-grin at Alphys, and raised her phone: “Selfie?”

The scientist snorted and shook her head jokingly, accepted and stood up to join her, posing with a smile and the classic V sign. Dawn just went for the dorkiest grin she could make. Sans turned around, the coffee pot in his hand just in time for the camera to catch his confused expression in the frame.

When the two girls looked at the result, they uniformly agreed that it looked terrible. Sans asked them to show him the filters to apply so they could make Dawn’s soon-to-be-screen wallpaper look even worse. Sans soon gave up and seemed resigned that he now had to accept the
“Anyway... What’s the plan?” Dawn eventually asked.

“for now, breakfast.” Sans shrugged distractedly. Apparently, it was not time yet to talk about serious stuff, huh. He opened the microwave and pulled out a fuming plate before offering it to her. “bacon.”

The human stared at the plate for three solid seconds, blinking in surprise. She took some of it, but her expression remained until he jokingly asked her what was wrong with it.

“Nah, I’m not gonna ask how the heck you can make magic food bacon.” She pouted in confusion, shook her head... But soon she gave in. “...Okay, question: do you have magic pigs? Shouldn’t pigs turn to dust when they die? How does that work? Are we eating monster dust?”

Both monsters stared at her blankly for about ten seconds. Then Sans burst out laughing loudly and started making incoherent babbling mockeries until he lost his breath. Dawn’s expression turned deeply offended and flustered one.

“What? It’s a legitimate question!”

“Well, it’s not actual meat.” Alphys
answered. “Originally, our food came from some species of magic plants and beings. But we only have vegan food now, as very few of these creatures were underground with us, so we’ve only been able to grow magic crops. So... all types of food are actually inspired by human meals and manufactured.”

“You mean they’re GMO?” She raised an eyebrow.

“... I have no idea what that means.”

Dawn admitted after a few more seconds of blank stare. She was wondering if monsters had DNA at all, or even, much less, what it was about any kind of biological system that had anything to do with common with the biology she was familiar with (which, admittedly did not know much about to begin with). In any case, if their bodies’ biology did not rely on anything of genetic language or whatever, there was no question as to whether or not they knew how to alter it, or whether they would bother doing it in the first place.

Alphys eventually sighed as she took some food herself and filled her plate. “Look, it’s just as safe as any other types of food. It looks and takes like bacon.”

Maybe she had read the teenager’s expression.
had been wary of the food she had been given. It wasn’t like she’d ever fear that any of these guys would poison her food or anything. She was just curious. Because heck. Food that’s literally made out of meat. How awesome is that.

... That did not taste like bacon. She stared in disbelief at what was standing at the end of her fork. That looked like bacon, true. It didn’t taste bad, it might have some kind of flavor. It may have felt like some sort of meat, but that was it. Not bacon. But it sure as heck looked like it. Well then.

Well, as she reasoned, the monsters had been underground for whatever how long that made centuries or something, and in the meantime they had watched the Garbage dump and human movies and anything and everything that they could. It was reference for what was going on outside. They didn’t have images and sounds, but nothing else. So... She couldn’t exactly blame them for getting some tastes wrong, especially when they literally had no outside reference.

Still. She really couldn’t have even five minutes of getting something weird, could she...? It was a bit of a letdown, but she kinda would have liked having a break every once and then. She was enjoying all the new stuff, but still, curious, she wanted to respect the change in customs. She had to be a good guest and all that, but... Well. Breakfast...
be a good guest and all that, but... Welp. Breakfast.
She was just asking for five minutes of tranquility. Was that too much to ask?
She decided that she could just as well start a conversation that would be actually useful. Maybe that would draw her from the not-so-mundane mundanities from the

“So... I was just wondering. How many people know about the situation, exactly? I probably sho
asked earlier, but...”

“just us three.” Sans replied immediately.

“Everyone knows Sans is working here.” Alphys completed. “They know that the purpose is basically to go back in time but stop the last human arrived, and stop the rampage. But we didn’t tell anyone about the video game, or the time lapse.”

“and we didn’t tell anyone about you.” he said sharply, his stuck-on smirk looking for the first time strained and nervous. “so, uh, i didn’t think it was necessary to tell ya this before, but yeah, i’m in hiding right now. it’s likely that if anyone there’s a human here, they’ll wanna kill you or just try to convince that many don’t wanna to, some would probably be cool with it, just don’t know that for sure, y’know? so
don’t do anythin stupid while you’re here.”

“Yeah...” She nodded tensely, looking down glumly and guiltily. “I wasn’t planning to anyway, but...

He quickly reassured her that it shouldn’t be too hard to stay unnoticed given the fact that everyone currently living on the other side of the cavern had the thought that she was basically an outlaw. Saddening. She wished the other monsters didn’t have to live in suffering and fear until they were done with the time machine and launched the Last Reset, but...

Well, some things just could not be solved so easily; she had to accept the reality that she was, after all, a teenager who had been invited in a world that wasn’t that despite everything, there were limitations to what they had control upon. Maybe she had to find a cure for the protagonist syndrome that was trying to make its way in her head. She was special in this world due to the fact she was a Special Human or whatever, but Sans had a plan and the plan did not require her to do anything particular. On the contrary, acting like Frisk and being all Def to Save Everyone or whatever was probably one of the most efficient ways to completely jeopardize his safety. So her role was simple: she had to stay put, and help however she could with what was happening at the house. Not outside of it.
She hoped she could be at least somewhat useful in the basement. That was the least she could do.

“so here we were, all sittin ’round the science results and tryin to make some sense outta it. I think by that point he’d asked for help practically everyone in the lab, and nobody knew how to figure out how he could’ve got these results. everybody could hear theories from the technicians and the pros, like how the problem could’ve come from the pump, or someone forgot to calibrate the sensors, or the sample was too old, we even got that we sayin it was evidence of that eighth type of... he’d been talkin about for a decade or what.”

Sans had started telling some sort of college story. Dawn had a hard time following. It was something about a machine malfunctioning during his practical experiment in the middle of his finals, maybe... Well, seeing him happy and smiling was all she really needed to be reassured how he felt in general, but she would have preferred to be able to at least understand what he was talking about.

“and then you know what? turned out the problem just forgott’n to plug the destabilizer in. ’f course, I thought it was a bit of a coincidence, if you were thinkin...”
he used that I was seeing if you were just bullshit and put the ones who were laugh
dishwashing duty. anyway, that’s how i got chromatography and realized that magic
theory was boring as hell.”

The atmosphere in Sans’s basement was... interesting to say the least. They were working and each giving and they were gladly helping each other out when some assistance was required. Unsurprisingly, Dawn was most of the time staying on the sidelines and mostly watching the two monsters waiting patiently for one of them to ask for help for something that would keep her busy for the next few minutes because it would happen to be a step that would require her to hold something firmly so the other monsters could focus on a precise task or something of the like. Either way, she was either waiting in a corner, or by holding something still or carrying stuff around the basement so the two others could focus on their hand. Still, she was docile and had pretty much accepted this outcome, and she was happy to be of help in not being too much of a nuisance or taking too much when her help was not required. She was bored, but then again, she was good at waiting when she knew for a fact that it was the wisest thing to do.
All in all, everything was going smoothly...

“hey intern, i need the qm recalibratin tangle

Alphys rolled her eyes, sighing with little conv.

“She’s not an intern, Sans.”

... So smoothly, it appeared that they felt the need things up themselves by finding various and un ways to create some playful, ironic bickering.

“is she a professional technician? does she any experience whatsoever in entanglement or does she have any idea what she’s doing?

The skeleton’s grin was definitely the one of a wanted nothing but to playfully mess with the around him even if they were his friends, because other motive but pure boredom. Seeing the lack answer from both girls, he shrugged trollesquely.

“So she’s an intern. also, where’s that tangle

Dawn sighed. “I would give it to you, but... That is that supposed to be? I don’t even have a clue its supposed to look like.”

Alphys rummaged through her box for a few se then pulled out a small tool that she held in w

“Oh, here it is.”
The human blinked. “That... looks like a screwdriver.”

“Why don’t you just call it a screwdriver?”

“Then ya got your answer. damn are interns. what do they teach ya kids in schools nowadays.”

Dawn sent him a death glare, muttering with

“... I’ll just keep calling it a screwdriver.”

Sans had started it, without surprise, but Alphys and he were quick to find their own ways to chat or verbalize with him in return. As long as this did not affect their work, the casual banter and jokes were welcomed and actually helped lift everyone’s spirits.

When the human teenager gave Sans this screwdriver, magic tool, the one thing she had definitely not, when watching him use it led her to ponder a few issues regarding her current situation; she did not think that many better things to do, anyway.

The skeleton pretended not to see her watching, not to be bothered by it; as he brought his seat to his desk and adjusted a magnifying lens so it could... on a certain part of the circuitry he was about to... he hovered his tool closer and, in a second, small
white emerged then vanished all around his hand. It took a few dozen seconds of mesmerized inspection before she could finally confirm that those little, somewhat solid white lights that were flying around with speed and carving patterns in the metal board as if it were butter, were actually magic bullets.

This observation led to a long list of unspoken questions. She wondered whether these bullets were created and directed through that whatever-it-was-called tool if Sans was making them himself. Seeing how he was making some motions with his hands, it did not seem to be in relation with the movement of the bullets. It appeared that Sans really was the only one creating and controlling them all by himself. To give a closer look at those bullets in order to see if they could be just really tiny bones, but they were less an inch long and they were moving way too fast to see anything more than just a blur of light.

Seeing magic bullets had first frightened her on the ship, and just like during that moment the previous night when Alphys had lost her cool, she wondered how they could appear outside of battle. Then again, she remembered how Undyne could totally summon as many magic spears as she wanted while in the overworld, and effectively use them for things other than mere battle: although that would not
questionable choice, she was able to use one to cook pasta in a pan. So, maybe no FIGHT was initiated because these bullets were left alone to do what the monsters summoned them wanted them to do...?

She wondered if the entire world would turn more violent whenever a FIGHT was initiated, the same way it represented both in the game and in some fan animations, and part of her was tempted to trigger one to satisfy this curiosity... But, nah, that wasn’t worth the risk and waste of time this would be to do something stupid. Curiosity was a very strong motivator, but never a worthy motivation by itself.

Also, she soon remembered that during Undyne, Frisk could hold her spear however they wanted and a FIGHT was triggered as long as Undyne was the one who initiated the idea; so maybe the intent was also required to start the FIGHT, if it weren’t the only trigger? Instead of the contact with the bullet...?

That was probably up for debate. Maybe she would ask Sans or Alphys later, at a time when they would be focused on their advanced magic-y science stuff.

Another question that immediately went over her mind was: “Aren’t bullets only meant for fighting?” Could it be that monsters were actually using them in other ways too?
maybe their magic in general, for much more usages than just the occasional FIGHT? Her mind conflicted between the part that was thinking they had these magic powers, obviously they would use them whenever they felt like it due to how they could be; and the part that was trying to make sense out of Undertale’s gameplay and just how it was these monsters’ mundane life.

Not once since she arrived did she notice anything that would undeniably prove to her that she was inside the game, apart from the fact that duh, she was surrounded by the game’s characters and the landscapes of the Underground, and even though Sans and Alphys were incredibly realistic, the fact that the game was this world was all she really needed to remember. world’s rules of physics were different than hers.

She had never seen any floating buttons giving her she could make, there were no dialogue boxes she had never seen any ‘screen mode’ other than the overworld one; but maybe Sans and Alphys had just as sure that she would stay away from gameplay elements much as possible for her own safety... or for the maybe. Maybe they weren’t trusting her completely, especially if she was supposed to be a ‘Player’ and have more options than they did... or something like
When she had asked him for details in the morning, he did tell her (reluctantly) that her SOUL was supposed to be about four times stronger than a regular human's. Adding that to the fact that she was most probably more intelligent than Frisk and that, during this Run, a kid had been responsible for so much pain and destruction... She had never thought about what kind of disaster she could cause herself if she snapped, but she was very glad that she, at least, had the mental strength to have enough mental health to stay positive and give her the strength to move forward. Because duh. Who would be crazy enough to actually murder these guys while being fully aware that they had been good to the world while being sentient and asked for nothing but freedom and peace?

Seeing that maybe her staring was in fact distracting him, she decided to slowly walk away and give him some space so he could keep working quietly; the gesture seemed to indeed let him relax a little bit. Was he anxious about the proximity to the bullets, maybe? Yeah, maybe she should have kept her distance since the start; his work looked hard, it was all about precision, but maybe controlling the bullets’ trajectories like this was harder when they were so small, and potentially sharp. She probably should have realized sooner just how difficult this specific task was.

As soon as the small buzzing sound of the tiny hand-carving the board stopped, Sans pulled the lens...
he turned around with an expression that implied he revealed what he was about to do:

“welp. this is gettin a bit too quiet.” he affirmed with a resolute, joking sigh. “who’s for puttin on more background music?”

“I veto all Undertale OST and fan songs.” Alphys retorted immediately, without even looking away from her work.

“Ditto.” the human added, just as quickly.

The two girls heard a muttered curse and they snorted in unison. There was no further opposition to their decision, so soon Dawn started her playlist of random songs that nothing to do with the game and that hopefully would include too much meme material.

“you think you’re so clever, huh.” Sans grunted humorously. “al, you done with your part on the motherboard?”

“Almost.” she confirmed while nodding.

“Great. might be ‘bout time we started packin everythin together then, don’t ya think?”

Dawn realized that it was finally the time when Sans remove that purplish blanket in the back of the which meant that it was finally the time when s
discover just what was beneath it. Just like skeleton’s left hand grabbed one corner and after a pull, the whole fabric tumbled to the floor. The teenager blinked in shock.

“Wait, what the...” Her eyes zigzagged horizontally for a few seconds. “There’s two of them?”

“duh.” He rolled his eyes overdramatically, jokingly at her ignorance. “how else do you think you brought you here? i know my shortcuts aren’t the best but don’t overestimate them. interdimensional travel’s still out of my reach without some high-level magic.”

“I... kinda just assumed that you used your time machine, to be honest.” she answered sheepishly.

The look in his eye-sockets seemed to tell that he was so badly to start some scientific rant about how it was to think that a time machine could do something like this, but he quickly decided against it, instead muttering something to the lines of “ain’t that easy, bud. that’s not how it works.”

“anyway, looks like we’ve got some time before we al’s done with her part. somethin tells me you need some more explainin’ in the meantime. don’t take too long.”

“Luh...” Dawn was soon reminded of all the things...
Dawn was soon reminded of all the things regarding the potentially depressing implications behind this machine and what exactly it could mean for him. Should she really go on and make talk about what was very likely to be some memories...? “I w-wouldn’t want to impose, but you’re curious about it.” He shrugged, closing sockets and chuckling lazily. “Ehh, it’s cool. i still owe you some answers after draggin’ this way, right?” He winked. “’sides, it’s nice that you seem interested in this stuff. My best friend loves physics. Probably because her dad.” She answered with an awkward smile. “So... I don’t understand a lot of it, but it’s hard to be curious at least a little when she’s so passionate about it all the time. Maybe her passion’s contagious or whatever. Also, I think she’s jealous that I’m better at math than she is. Ha.”

“You’re good at math?” he raised a nonchalant eyebrow in surprise.

“It’s just that it’s her weak point and I’m not too bad she pouted, looking away. “Doesn’t mean I think Math is dumb and unimaginative.” The monster snickered. “I disagree with that.
lot of levels, but that's your opinion I guess.

He stayed still next to her, as they both kept staring at two machines standing side by side, now in silence. A few more seconds, Sans invited her to look at the machine on the left with a wide nod from his skull.

"that's the one that brought you here." he explained while gesturing it with a lazy hand which...

The gigantic monstrosity was much bigger than the one that weirdly towered them with almost ten-feet-tall, dark towering them with almost ten-feet-tall, dark thighs and long wires strangling an approximately human cavity surrounded by what was likely to be the giant brain. She had guessed that inviting people into another reality would require a lot of energy and means.

All she could see there was that he really had put effort into that project. Besides... She wondered how he could have possibly worked. She was certain that actual matter inside a virtual reality was not supposed to be possible, so... Had he used that machine to recreate a body to store her consciousness or something? The more she thought about it, the more her pangs of The Matrix seemed to be the explanation that most sense to her.

This also raised the question of what happened to her actual body back in her own world. Sans had asked her to stay away from the laboratory, and she was still scared to open her eyes in it. She had arrived...
that she would be able to go back safe and sound as he was done, but... How did that work? Was her body in a coma or something? If she was meant to be here for at least a few weeks, shouldn’t that be a concern for her health? Could it be that by now, her parents had sent her comatose body to a hospital or something? Yikes, that was a creepy thought. Part of her reminded herself that Sans had promised that she would be fine. So, she had trouble understanding how he could keep his promise, but she reasoned that she probably wasn’t examining the situation under the right perspective, which would explain why she had missed some key details.

One of those key details could just as well be the following question: did time even work the same way in both worlds? In the plot of most of the fiction she knew about where the setting would be similar to her current situation, most of these stories ended with some sort of justification as to why characters from the player’s world ever got to question or even doubt anything: the fact that it had all been some sort of dream overnight, the fact that somehow the events of the story had occurred in the span of just a few minutes and then led to the best outcome due to some weird, faulty relativity physics. Dawn used to think of this kind of plot conclusion as a cheap tactic or excuse that would allow the author to get away with too many loose ends, but now she knew that there could be a reason for it.
these stories not to involve anyone from the play, but now...? She actually hoped that this cheap tack would be what reality had in store for her, because she did not want anyone to worry about her, and being not ready to explain anyone what exactly what happened to her in the meantime. Especially the police was to be involved. That would be awkward.

Maybe she would just literally find herself waking up in the bedroom, her slobbering face resting at a pair against the keyboard, now with imprints of random letters on her forehead or something, realize that practically no time had passed at all. Kidnapping. That would be embarrassing, but this also be the most convenient solution both regarding problems of health and trauma from her family, one of finding a proper way to tell them what had happened. If hardly any time had passed for them, so much wouldn’t even have had the time to realize that time had gone, maybe there wouldn’t be anything to explain.

She didn’t have time to mentally gossip much though, because Sans had already moved on to explanations and was now entirely focused on a block of steel and iron. It appeared that the machine was purring, as if it were already working; but soon he flip a few switches, and the noise stopped promptly.
the indicator lights turned off.

“as for this one... well, you know it already. what we’re gonna work on today.” His wide eyes were shining with hope. “it was fully funded a long time ago. still kinda is. it got caught in an accident at some point, but we really just needed to fix a few old bruises and then find a power source strong enough, and it’s good to go. it’s gonna take some time, but... well, if it weren’t for time, i would’ve totally been able to fix it a while ago. it’s not like it’s gonna actually hard to do it now.”

She was certain that he was making it sound a lot easier than it would really be, but seeing how they were working so far, she fully trusted him. She, personally, would certainly not be able to understand a lot of what they were going to do, but as a team, they would be fine. With both Sans and Alphys as the monsters they were working on it at the same time, she knew that there was nothing to worry about.

Speaking of Alphys, she called out to them and knew that she was done with her part of... what had been doing. They weren’t really explaining what their work was for. Well, she couldn’t read
them: at first they really had tried to tell her the basic fact that they were working on something obviously some advanced science stuff even for them and that their technology seemed to include a lot of concepts that she was completely unfamiliar with so she soon gave up trying to explain her anything doing anything at all as it was likely to become. Apparently they were living in a world where the laws of physics were different, they literally based their science and their different laws of physics, magic, or whatever they supposed to call it. As if listening to humans talking about human science weren't complicated enough.

While Dawn was pondering whether physics was going to be a multiversal science or not, Sans left her side; the lizard scientist move the weird part of machine had been working on closer to the big time machine that was examining. She soon pulled herself out of her when she noticed their struggle and dashed to the

One thing she had been shocked to learn was the monsters were incredibly weak physically — at least and Alphys were. They could work through life much trouble, but apparently moving heavy stuff was taking a lot more out of them than she would have expected: even if she considered herself to be physically built, she appeared to be a lot stronger.
She attributed this to the fact that monsters’ bodies were physically much weaker than humans’ according to the game’s lore; but still, seeing this for herself was completely surprising. Could they actually injure themselves to a serious extent if they were to carry around something that was too heavy for them? Could such effort... *dust* them? One thing was clear, she did *not* want to find out.

As soon as the part of machinery was carefully laid on the ground, the monsters thanked her like the previous times and like the previous times she brushed it off, too. She wondered about what could have happened to them if she had come to help. She theorized that in other facilities where they were constantly building stuff, they probably had some equipment to help them properly, and that was why it happened that Sans did not have that sort of equipment in his basement due to a number of guessable reasons. The two monsters immediately went to open some cabinets and connect random colored wires between the time machine and whatever Alphys had been working on. Sans soon brought the parts he had crafted earlier and they connected one of them elsewhere on the machine, probably as a replacement of sorts because it had previously been removed from the machine a board the
similar to it, except that it was in pretty bad shape. Eventually, he went to a certain part of the machine, opened another panel, and motioned her to come closer. When she arrived and looked, she saw that the cavity in the machine stood a rather large, transparent thing containing some strange liquid-looking... thing.

“that’s the dt battery system.” he said, answering her implied question.

“DT... As in ‘determination’?”

“yep. as far as we know, that’s the only thing that can let things or people remain unchanged through time jumps – i mean resets” (he seemed to correct himself reluctantly) “or even cause them to change...”

That machine was running on determination...? you know. Then again, time machine, in the whole universe. Of course determination was the most likely choice for the engine’s fuel or whatever.

Now that she was thinking about it, she realized that really were only two functional machines in the room, responsible for her presence here, and the other to control time or whatever. But... What about memory? She remembered that he had mentioned something about... “manually saved his memory”, or something
Which to her meant that he had probably used some sort of machine for that too, and seeing that Sans had shut down the time machine just a few minutes ago. Could it be that this was what he was already using to keep his memory as well? She theorized that in order for the machine to be able to save his memory through time, the said machine needed to be present during each time period as well. So, seeing that according to the game the only machine supposed to be here from the start, it wasn’t too far-fetched.

For once... She wanted to make sure. She still had questions, after all, and maybe thinking everything through all by herself was a bit stupid, when she could just ask the guy that was standing right next to her and get the answers she wanted.

“I just thought...” she started awkwardly, then added, “It’s just... Is this what you’re using to rearrange the timelines?”

The wide eye-sockets and bright glowing dots in her showed that, first of all, her deduction was probably correct, and that, second, he definitely expected her to be able to make that deduction.

“well... yeah. good job on guessin’ that.” He smiled. “you prolly know what happens if you mix mo
and determination—” (she flinched) “— yeah, see what i’m talkin’ about. so if the machine is one holding on to it… it can save anything for

He looked uncomfortable. A dark part of her mind that since the machine was now turned off, and was supposed to save his memory, it was one of those moments when Sans’s mind was vulnerable to Resets. She was the one able to Reset if she wanted. She had just found out his greatest weakness. She gulped. Now more than ever, it was definitely time to screw up.

“I wasn’t supposed to know that, was I…” she was sending him an apologetic look, then sighed to

“I-it’s okay, I understand why you wouldn’t want to find out. I’m sorry I…”

He chuckled awkwardly, shaking his skull. “n-no, really just forgot to tell ya. i mean, never intended to hide that or anything, i would’ve told you if you asked, but there’s just…”

She clenched her teeth and fists in a mixture of that she had trouble identifying. Was her patience. She was not sure. The only thing she was sure about was that was enough.

“Sorry, I just…” He turned his angiogenesia way.
“Sands. Look.” He turned his anxious gaze toward her and she returned him a pair of upset, yet determined, eyes. “I know I’m… well. I’m really curious, a lot of stuff. I have a lot of questions. But… It’s not fair, you want to have your secrets. I still don’t know everything about you, and even if there are things back in my world, and even if I really want to ask you about it, it’s just… It’s not fair, you just know too much already.” She bit her lip and looked to the side. “So… I’ll always be here if you want to talk about some stuff or whatever, but maybe I know enough so I can understand how you feel or whatever, but… I only want you to talk if you want to. Okay?”

There was a long pause. Those two white glow kept staring at her and slightly trembled, but she went to look back at the machine and his form expanded a bit, as it finally became a lot more relaxed, genuinely relieved.

“… thanks, kid. really means a lot comin’ from you.”

She tried to give him an honest, encouraging return, although a little part of it was strained. She felt already that leaving him alone with his past harder than she made it sound, and she hated that mature could be so hard and frustrating sometime.
This was the right thing to do, wasn’t it? Even if it hurt, maybe she had to try to weight of amount of pain would hurt more: her pain of knowing was hiding things from her and that he didn’t trust his pain of feeling intruded on, on what was likely already painful parts of his life? Even though she assess properly the second option due to not knowing details of what it was all about, it still was easy to see the two possibilities.

“So, um, I don’t want to ruin a moment, but is the container coming already?” Sans and Dawn were pulled out of their thoughts. Alphys awkwardly called out to them, reminding them what they were supposed to do before they started chatting around.

“Oh, right.” the skeleton chuckled. He pulled a tool out of nowhere and quickly moved it around glass can, untangling the few wires connected to it and removing the screws keeping it in place. “Need to bring it over. Thing is, it’s a bit heavy.”

“No worries, I got it.” She grinned, then seized the container with both hands and swiftly, but carefully raised it from its original location. She winced “Seems like it is a bit heavy isn’t that right?
“Oof—okay, it is a bit heavier than I thought, but it’s fine. Where do you guys want me to put it?”

“Just here is fine, don’t worry.” the scientist smiled, pointing the floor against a corner of the machine and by her side.

After smiling and nodding in understanding, she divested the translucent can in her hands and secured it tightly against her chest... But that was when it happened.

Whatever happened, it happened fast. Dawn had barely the time to turn around and start walking toward the designated destination, when a flash of light occurred. A human teenager cried in shock and pain, there was the sound of a heavy object falling, and before anyone could even comprehend what had happened, the two duels monsters were facing a whimpering human lying on the floor and clutching her chest in pain, and a glass jar was rolling on the floor with a fracture that let its内容 slowly ooze out and leave a growing trail of shifting.

Okay, now that’s new. What just happened?!

“shit!” Sans was the first to react, and judging by his vocabulary, he was probably not in the state of mind to think. “no-no-no-no-no...”
Surprisingly enough, instead of focusing on the leak, he rushed towards the human and let Alphys take the leaking determination instead, as he carefully made a distance with it and even backed away on instinct. He feared he might have accidentally stepped on some sort of trigger. Dawn looked groggy and in pain, at best. He still tried to help her sit up and face him, but it did not seem to do all as the cracks in her grimace only deepened in pain. He carefully helped her lie back down and apologized. She had trouble thinking. She had no idea what happened, but she was certain she had let go of something she was supposed to hold on, and she heard panic and her name around her, and she remembered that what she was holding was some liquid determination or whatever it was she probably had messed up pretty badly by letting it go it, and she did not know what happened but the sensation was so strong and it hurt...

Yet, somehow, suddenly, that something in her was something that wasn’t pain. It was not enough to put her and make her forget about the pain, but it helped a bit by making it at least a lot more bearable, and gradually, she was able to regain at least some kind of control over her breathing and movements. Her eyes felt a bit wet, had been crying from the pain? When finally she opened her eyes if ever so slightly, the wetness made her vision blurry but the first thing she saw was a skull looming...
It was Sans, wasn’t it? But why did she feel like they weren’t supposed to look so bright and colored.

When Sans saw her eyes open, he did not wait any more.

“dawn, can you hear me?” he hurriedly called.

There were suddenly three small flashes of light that flickered in panic just behind his shot.

“How many bones do you see?”

Oh... So he had summoned a few bone bullets, he realized. Part of her wanted to feel threatened by the view of floating bones roaming right above her, but maybe she was too dazed to feel it. Maybe her brain was not able to read the right chemicals to raise any red flags, whether logically she should feel threatened or not.

Either way, she tried to strengthen her grip on the task best she could, by focusing on the simple task that had been given to her. But... was it really that simple?

“Uuuuh...” She looked confused and unsure, tried hard. “S-should I count you in it? I-i’m not sure how many b-bones there are in your body...”

Sans stared at her for a few seconds with a dead look. The bone-bullets vanished into thin air, then he softened his grip on her arms and plunged his hands in his pockets, turning around towards Alphys.
“... well, she’s fine.” he grumbled, rolling his eyes.

Alphys was crouching over the drops of determination on the floor with the open container by her side, and seemed to be using some form of magic in an attempt to tentatively guide the liquid back into the container without touching it directly. Needless to say, it was a rather ineffective process. Dawn wondered if Sans’ magic could have been more useful there, assumed it worked the way she imagined it. Which... was false, because the game never really made it much like any sort of actual telekinesis. Or did she probably wasn’t in the capability of thinking as a sort of thing right now.

“Sans, this isn’t funny.” the lizard said.

“Either you stay with her, or come help me clean this up.”

“i know, geez.” He sighed, then bent back over the human’s head and his gaze was more intense and focused. “seriously, how’re you feeling?”

Dawn scrunched up her face in odd, confused expression as if she was not sure herself. Still, she soon muttered unsure “... Better?” as an attempt to reassure Sans frowned and tried to move around, so Sans helped her sit up once more. This time, it appeared...
was not as painful as the previous attempt. However, as she was sitting up and looked down, she could find support on the ground, her eyes met a wide cyan light radiating from her chest. She looked up. Sans’s pupils glowed the same color. She looked down again. She brought both hands up in front of her face, the light as if to try to shield it from view and her face. Was that her SOUL?

“it looks okay enough... i think.” he muttered to himself, apparently still worried. His glowing pupils moved to look at her in the eye, although they kept a certain distance. Eye contact with a pair of cyan eyes was weird. “still, you got any idea what happened?” She shook her head nervously. It felt light. “No, no idea...” She blinked and stared again at her chest, then gulped uncomfortably. “Can you, not, do that again?”

The monster stared in confusion, then followed her line of sight to look at the big cyan heart-shaped shadow. He was ineffectively trying to hide with her hands. He had a realization, but did not seem that fazed by it.

“... oh. right.” He blinked again, and when his eyelids opened, his pupils were back to their original white color and regular shape. He grinned joyously. “what, never seen your soul before?”
She merely shook her head tensely, pursing her lips tightly. “It’s... big.” she grimaced.

“Well, it’s bigger than the ones you’re supposed to see around here, that’s for sure.” he nodded and shrugged casually, still smiling. “Four times stronger than the norm, remember?”

Alphys came over, as she was apparently done checking what could be fixed of the incident and went down next to Sans. She whispered to him that she would take it from here, and the human teenager felt relieved to see what she assumed to be the closest thing to a medic among monsters. She was not sure whether the damage had been severe really had happened, but the event had been shocking enough as it was, and now she needed to check that. “So... Something happened to my s-soul?” she asked immediately and fearfully.

Being hurt physically was one thing— especially if she had right now was not her real one, but rather a recreation of it or whatever it was like in the movie. Now, receiving damage to her SOUL? She was not sure what the consequences really were. Maybe she would be healed and her HP would go back to its max, or something as easy as that. Or maybe it was actually a transformation or she had changed into a different...
Sans and Alphys had looked panicked as if it were the last time they would see each other. Hardly listening to her question, the lizard scientist answered "I'll be the judge of that," and she already grabbed her shoulders and made her sit straight, staring directly at her chest without a word. When that weird feeling from a few minutes earlier came back, she had to wrap itself around her chest and Dawn smiled. The small lights flickering around Alphys's head, she understood it. She was using her magic to stare at her SOUL again.

... Damn that was awkward. Was this something that happened among monsters? Did they just look at each other, just like that whenever they felt like it? Maybe they had been more polite if they asked, at least, wouldn't they?

Judging by the look on Alphys's face as soon as she had had a glimpse of her SOUL, apparently she had never seen anything like it. She had studied Asgore's six SOULS, so maybe it had to do with the fact that hers was larger and bigger, maybe...? She hoped that it was because of the surprise of seeing for the first time an aberration. She didn't mean to do it, rather than because of something severe that might have happened to abovementioned aberration of her SOUL.

After what felt like forever, the monster sighed, her eyes in what seemed to be relief. The human's grip on her SOUL loosened, then gradually vanish.

"Well... It looks fine for now, at least..."
the scientist mumbled. “I would’ve preferred taking a full examination to be done, but I’d need you to be at the lab so I suppose that’s not an option. I guess we’ll just have to keep an eye on it to make sure it doesn’t worsen.”

Dawn gulped and sent the two monsters a distress look. “So... You guys don’t know what happened?”

“Not at all.” Alphys shook her head shamefully.

“not a clue.” Sans added gravely. “It never happened before, even when human souls were a thing, so I don’t know what your soul did, but that’s okay.”

When she saw the looks on the monsters’ faces, she looked down shamefacedly. They seemed to be even more worried about her than about the incident she had caused, and that was very sweet of them, but... What caused the incident? Maybe someone at least had to worry about it, part, too.

“D-did something happen to the container? Did you lose something important?” she asked guiltily.

Alphys snorted weakly, brushing off her question as if it were stupid. “It’s fine, don’t worry about that. Equipment breaks all the time. But I just can’t help thinking...”
time in the lab, that just happens.

The skeleton shook his skull heavily. “we didn’t much and the container’s easy to replace assured. His sockets opened and the glowing stared back at her. “you, on the other hand... a bit harder to replace your soul.”

There was a tense silence. Maybe, after all, she considered to be part of the equipment, and a part at that. She was soon reminded that she was a possible friend to them, but first and foremost hope. Whether they cared about her or not, they could not afford to lose her, because something would happen if they did. The human gulped, not look away from the determination can. After half Alphys was the first one to regain her speech as her a worried look and scrunched up expression.

“Listen, Dawn, m-maybe it’s best if

“Yeah.” She sighed deeply, then nodded blank frantically, her face still pale. “I’ll just... go ups

Sans nodded sharply. “good idea yeah.”

“I’ll... make us some brunch?” she said tenta forcedly tearing upwards the corners of her m

“How’s that sound?”
“Brunch sounds nice.” Alphys smiled sheepishly.

Dawn sent them one last look before leaving the flat, silently wishing that they could manage the rest even if they weren’t there to help. She hoped they wouldn’t have many heavy objects to move around.

Noon was near when Sans walked upstairs to see what human was doing; she had been left alone for twenty minutes, but still, after she left the atmosphere in the basement was simply... different. He didn’t know whether it would have been the same with only Dawn among them, because the discomfort was an incident either way and her presence downstairs wouldn’t have changed much, but... Well. Maybe she needed some fresher air after spending hours within a confined environment. After everything that had happened, he really was tired, too. Maybe he just needed a break.

He had just reached the living room when he heard knocking on the main door; without thinking, he turned and slowly walked to it before opening—

... Wait. Who could be at the main door, in this at this moment, when Alphys was downstairs, Brin in the kitchen, and everyone else was supposed to be anywhere but here?

Well, he had already turned the handle. It was too late.
Well, he had already turned the handle. It wasn’t pretend that nobody was home.

“Good morning, Sans.” went the cheerful, oblivious voice of Grillby. “It’s been a while, Sans was hit by the irrepressible urge to face-palm.

When he had sent that text mentioning lunch, had he taken it literally? As in, right the next day and in.

“... h-heya, grillbs.” He grinned forcedly, hid nervousness as best he could and praying nobody would appear in the frame of the door he tried to shield the view of the inside of the Which, given his small stature, was a losing “what... brings you here? if you don’t mind me.

“Everybody is coming back. Didn’t you the King last week?” Seeing the sick, horrified look, which he mistook for mere the fire elemental thought a bit more. “... Oh that I’m thinking about it, you probably weren’t there when we talked about

*Everybody was coming back.* Sans had no idea what to do with this revelation from desperately trying to tone down the “we’re thought that repeated itself in cycles in his skull. never happened before... But then again, as far as
remember, that was the only time the world took a
before going back to the beginning, especially in
during which the kid had died, so...

Still. Shouldn’t Alphys have warned him about this?
He was going to have a word with her, as soon
immediate problem in front of him was taken care

“In any case,” Grillby continued joyfully,
pulling out a hamburger and a bottle of ketchup
his bag, “since we’re all back in town,
 wanted to give you a small surprise
encouragement. It must have been
for you to stay here all alone.
you should join us tonight, we pl
a small party for our return; no
too fancy, it’s just so we could
some time together after what happen

“that’s... oh geez.” Sans seized the gifts with
bony hands, knowing less and less how to
“um... thanks. i... that’s really, nice of you?”

The taller monster chuckled deeply, readjust
glasses. “You’re very welcome. I misse
too, you know. During these hard time
we must... stick together.” He brought
hands behind his back and waited in front of the
still. Seeing that Sans was not moving en
he finally seemed to understand that he was not as welcome as he had anticipated. "Um. Is this the wrong moment?"

Sans’s expression lit up in fake realization. "ahh, it’s the... generator. it’s unstable. I should probably go back to it before it, y’know, explodes or something.

Come on, this is so easy. Everyone knows that’s Dawn chose this exact moment to excitedly enter the kitchen with a large plate in her hands and a smile, brightened as soon as she saw Alphys walk up to them.

“Oh hey!” she called out to the lizard scientist. "enthusiasm, not having given a single glance to the front door. “There’s almost nothing but Bolognese spaghetti in the fridge so I wanted to try something a bit different, but all I could find was some random stuff and Pesto sauce. So I made Pesto sandwiches. It doesn’t taste as bad as it sounds.” She smiled, took one of the small sandwiches in question into it and...

... and finally noticing the two other monsters present in the room. She froze in place and widened her eyes, managing to keep her hold on the plate.

Grillby remained perfectly still, facing a human almost twice as tall as the one who had been with...
“Sans.” Dawn grumbled, gritting her teeth. “I got the message. So now, could you please stop singing?”

The last notes of Megalovania turned to a dejected silence, if only for the few seconds the skeleton needed to turn towards her, shrug with a smug smile, and retort:

“what message? there’s no message. s’not my fault if it’s catchy, blame the guy who made the music.”

And the singing resumed, soon accompanied with a concert of sighs coming from both girls in the room.

“Sans, for the love of the Angel, please stop.” Alphys pleaded while rubbing her tired face. “I haven’t had my coffee yet. It’s way too early for memes.”

“pft. weaklings.” He snorted mockingly, walking casually towards the coffeemaker and flipping a switch. “here ya go. will be ready in a minute.”
He quietly made his way back to the kitchen table and took a seat beside the human teenager, watching her with amusement as she was staring angrily at her phone and tediously undoing all the damage he had caused. The monster smirked internally when he realized that she had still to notice more than half of the jokes he had in store.

When silence fell in the room (except for the awkward purrs of the coffee machine), Sans started to utter an excuse so he could sing some more, but he was instantly cut short when Alphys asked Dawn to play some music on her phone, to which she instantly agreed. After a few more minutes of arguing, the trio reached the compromise that her phone could play some of its tracks as background music, as long as all Sans-related songs were automatically banned from the list.

Well, more precisely, this agreement was reached by the two girls, who won by default due to the rules of democracy. Disappointment was very evident on Sans’s skull, but all at the same time he probably was internally relieved that he would not have to worry about potential existential crises or of seeing or hearing things that would remind him of...

He needed to see Alphys’s reaction to understand what exactly the song that was currently playing, *Fishy Love*, was all about. But when he did, his response was immediate.

“oh *come on*. why does SHE get to watch stuff about her, and not me?”

“Sans, no offense, but contrary to you, I’m not the literal embodiment of meme.” Alphys sighed, shaking her head pseudo-solemnly.

“Not to mention, your meme potential is increased exponentially in my world. So, trust me, this is also for the sake of your own mental health.” Dawn added sheepishly, but with a half-grin distorted by a mixture between pity and mockery.

“you *do* know i’ve already seen half of it, right?” the skeleton deadpanned.

“Well, then you don’t need to see it again, do you?” Alphys smirked trollesquely.

Dawn and Alphys shared a synchronized snort and laughs, then high-fived.

Well, considering the fact that Alphys only has four fingers, the terminology could be up for debate. But you get the idea.

The white rectangular phone was magically snatched from Dawn’s hands by something that had come and then vanished so quickly, she hardly had time to see anything but a swift white blur, and after the few seconds she needed to get over the shock, she raised her eyes and saw that the skeleton now had it in his hands, despite the fact that he had not moved the slightest from his seat.
on the other side of the table.

Then again, he quickly frowned angrily while staring at the screen, as he had turned it on only to be greeted by some sort of grid puzzle preventing him from doing anything else.

“… huh. that’s new.” he grumbled dejectedly.

The teenager smugly stood up from her seat and walked towards him, then stopped in front of him and raised an open hand that politely invited him to give her back her electronical property.

“This is what we commonly call a password, Sans. It’s meant to stop nosy people like you from messing with my files again. So, I’m sorry to announce this, but your little snooping around is over.”

The expression Sans returned her was only that of a non-impressed skeleton troll who had just been challenged. His glowing pupils radiated the Smug and seemed to murmur: “you’re underestimating me big time, bud. you’re gonna regret it.” His stuck-on smirk slowly expanded menacingly.

“you’re on.”

“Yeah, right. Good luck.” She rolled her eyes. “Anyway, I still have to clean up a lot of stuff on it, so I’d like it if you could give it back, now.”

He hesitated, but eventually sighed in defeat and gave in, letting her take back her little piece of technology in peace. If he could pout, she was certain that it was the expression he would have shown on his skull.

“whoa hey. i see what you’re doin here.” he uttered in frustration when he immediately saw her looking for a new image to replace her wallpaper. “you’re not gonna put the old one again, are you?”

Alphys snorted. “Aw, what’s wrong with pics of baby bones being cuddled by the King? You shouldn’t be jealous, you were MUCH cuter than that when you were born.”

Sans was about to say something, but the embarrassment was now obvious on his skull, and he was interrupted anyway when Dawn apparently choked on air and then had some sort of mixture between a coughing fit and hysterical laughter.
“Wait, you…” The human pointed shakily the lizard scientist, then the skeleton standing right next to her. “Y-you. Saw him. As a baby?” she asked in disbelief as soon as she could somewhat control her giggles.

“I know it doesn’t show, but I’m twelve years older than him, actually.” the lizard answered proudly while playing with her nonexistent eyebrows. “And have I SEEN him? I BABYSAT these brothers, girl. We’re family.”

The human gasped over dramatically, a huge dorky grin on her face. “No. Way. So you have… babysitting stories or something?”

Alphys’s demonic smirk was slicing her entire muzzle. “You have NO idea.”

“Al. D o n ’ t .”

When she turned her head back towards Sans, finally realizing just how silent he had been until that moment, Dawn was not sure what to expect. In any case, there were two very obvious observations she could make instantly:

First of all, somehow, it was indeed possible for skeletons to blush. Papyrus had proven it in the game, but still, there was a huge difference between seeing it on a pixelated sprite, and seeing it on a realistic monster made of bones.

And second, the fans’ headcanon that Sans would blush cyan or blue was wrong. It was the regular color for a blush, and the exact same color as any monster blushing in the game, that was to say, the most saturated red you could imagine. Also, the blush was not just a color on his bones, it was actually faintly glowing. His skull almost looked like one of those lightbulbs in a Christmas decoration right now. If not as adorable as it would have looked in a fanart, it was at the very least hilarious to watch live on the real guy.

“Whatever you say, Rudolf.” Dawn smirked playfully, trying her best not to give in to laughter but quickly enough failing miserably.

She realized after a split second that it was very likely that neither Alphys nor Sans would catch on the reference, but it was too late, and when her brain made the mistake of associating the concepts ‘blushing Sans’ and ‘Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer’, the mental image of a glowing Sans in a
reindeer costume was enough to make her howl in laughter and bury her head in her hands as embarrassed tears began to appear in the corner of her eyes.

Too late. The image is here now, and it will never go away.

The two monsters watched her in surprise and confusion, but she could not see them and she certainly was not currently in the physical capability of explaining anyone anything. When the coffee was ready and the human finally managed to calm down, her messy hair and reddened face made her look at least just as ridiculous as the initial subject of her hilarity.

“Seriously though, I really need to find a better wallpaper. Hmm.”

She wiped the wetness off her eyes and tried to arrange her hair a bit, but sadly, it appeared that sleeping in a sofa along with an electricity-based lizard monster was not a good idea if you wanted to be photogenic on the next day.

“Well, that’s about as good as it’s ever gonna be.” she mumbled in defeat, pouting. She sent a sheepish grin at Alphys, and raised her phone: “Selfie?”

The scientist snorted and shook her head jokingly, but she accepted and stood up to join her, posing with a small smile and the classic V sign. Dawn just went for the widest, dorkiest grin she could make. Sans turned around with the coffee pot in his hand just in time for the camera to catch his confused expression in the frame.

When the two girls looked at the result, they unanimously agreed that it looked terrible. Sans asked them to delete it. These were the two reasons why they spent the next ten minutes sitting one next to the other and discussing which filters to apply so they could make Dawn’s soon-to-be lock screen wallpaper look even worse. Sans soon gave up and seemed resigned that he now had to accept the cruelty of the world. Until he figured out her password, that was.

“Anyway… What’s the plan?” Dawn eventually asked.

“for now, breakfast.” Sans shrugged distractedly. Apparently, it was not time yet to talk about serious stuff, huh. He opened the microwave and pulled out a fuming plate before offering it to her. “bacon?”

The human stared at the plate for three solid seconds, blinking in surprise. She took some of it, but her shocked expression remained until he jokingly asked her what was wrong with it.

“Nah, I’m not gonna ask how the heck you can make magic food bacon.” She pouted in confusion
and shook her head… But soon she gave in. “… Okay quick question: do you have magic pigs? Shouldn’t magic pigs turn to dust when they die? How does that even work? Are we eating monster dust?”

Both monsters stared at her blankly for about a dozen seconds. Then Sans burst out laughing loudly and tried to make incoherent babbling mockeries until he looked like he had trouble breathing. Dawn’s expression turned into a deeply offended and flustered one.

“What? It’s a legitimate question!”

“Well, it’s not actual meat.” Alphys simply answered. “Originally, our food came from some species of magic plants and beings… But we only have vegan food now, since very few of these creatures were trapped underground with us, so we’ve only been able to grow magic crops. So… all other types of food are actually inspired from human meals and manufactured.”

“You mean they’re GMO?” She raised an eyebrow.

“… I have no idea what that means.” Alphys admitted after a few more seconds of blank stares.

Dawn returned her surprised look, but then she started wondering if monsters had DNA at all, or even, maybe, just about any kind of biological system that had anything in common with the biology she was familiar with (which she admittedly did not know much about to begin with).

In any case, if their bodies’ biology did not rely on that sort of genetic language or whatever, there was no question as to whether or not they knew how to alter it, or why they would bother doing it in the first place.

Alphys eventually sighed as she took some slices herself and filled her plate. “Look, it’s just as safe as any other types of food. It just looks and takes like bacon.”

Maybe she had read the teenager’s expression as if she had been wary of the food she had been given. Oh well. It wasn’t like she’d ever fear that any of these guys would poison her food or anything. She was just curious.

Because heck. Food that’s literally made out of magic.

How awesome is that.

… That did not taste like bacon.
She stared in disbelief at what was standing at the end of her fork. That looked like bacon, true.

It didn’t taste bad, it might have some kind of taste that may have felt like some sort of meat, but that was not bacon. But it sure as heck looked like it. Weiiiiiiird.

Well, as she reasoned, the monsters had been trapped underground for whatever how long that made, maybe centuries or something, and in the meantime they only had the Garbage dump and human movies and anime as a reference for what was going on outside. They had the images and sounds, but nothing else. So… She couldn’t exactly blame them for getting some tastes wrong, since they literally had no outside reference.

Still. She really couldn’t have even five minutes without getting something weird, could she…? It was a lot of fun, but she kinda would have liked having a break every now and then. She was enjoying all the new stuff, she was curious, she wanted to respect the change in culture and be a good guest and all that, but… Welp. Breakfast, please. She was just asking for five minutes of tranquility and normality. Was that too much to ask?

She decided that she could just as well start a conversation that would be actually useful. Maybe that would distract her from the not-so-mundane mundanities from this world.

“So… I was just wondering. How many people know about the situation, exactly? I probably should’ve asked earlier, but…”

“just us three.” Sans replied immediately.

“Everyone knows Sans is working here.” Alphys completed. “They know that the plan is basically to go back in time before the last human arrived, and stop their rampage. But we didn’t tell anyone else about the video game, or the time loops…”

“and we didn’t tell anyone about you.” he added sharply, his stuck-on smirk looking for the first time strained and nervous. “so, uh, i didn’t think it was necessary to tell ya this before, but yeah, you’re in hiding right now. it’s likely that if anyone sees there’s a human here, they’ll wanna kill you on sight, and i’m not sure i could convince that many people not to. some would probably be cool with it, but we just don’t know that for sure, y’know? so… just don’t do anythin stupid while you’re here.”

“Yeah…” She nodded tensely, looking down gloomily and guiltily. “I wasn’t planning to anyway, but… yeah.”
He quickly reassured her that it shouldn’t be too hard for her to stay unnoticed given the fact that everyone else was currently living on the other side of the cavern; but still, the thought that she was basically an outlaw was… saddening. She wished the other monsters didn’t have to live in suffering and fear until they were done with Sans’s time machine and launched the Last Reset, but…

Well, some things just could not be solved so easily. Maybe she had to accept the reality that she was, after all, just a teen who had been invited in a world that wasn’t hers and that despite everything, there were limitations to what she had control upon. Maybe she had to find a cure to the protagonist syndrome that was trying to make its way up in her head. She was special in this world due to being a Special Human or whatever, but Sans had a plan, and the plan did not require her to do anything particularly heroic; on the contrary, acting like Frisk and being all Determined to Save Everyone or whatever was probably one of the most efficient ways to completely jeopardize his plan.

So her role was simple: she had to stay put, and maybe help however she could with what was happening inside the house. Not outside of it.

She hoped she could be at least somewhat useful once in the basement. That was the least she could do.

“so here we were, all sittin ‘round the spectra results and tryin to make some sense outta them. i think by that point he’d asked for help from practically everyone in the lab, and nobody could figure out how he could’ve got these results. y’could hear theories from the technicians and the pros, like how the problem could’ve come from the pump, or someone forgot to calibrate the sensors, or the sample was too old, we even got that lunatic sayin it was evidence of that eighth type of magic he’d been talkin about for a decade or whatever.”

Sans had started telling some sort of college story that Dawn had a hard time following. It was something about a machine malfunctioning during his practical exercises in the middle of his finals, maybe… Well, seeing him so chatty and happy was all she really needed to be reassured about how he felt in general, but she would have preferred being able to at least understand what he was talking about.

“and then you know what? turned out the prof’d just forgott’n to plug the destabilizer in. ‘f course he used that ‘i was seeing if you were listening’ bullshit and put the ones who were laughing on dishwashing duty. anyway, that’s how i got a d in chromatography and realized that magic color theory was boring as hell.”

The atmosphere in Sans’s basement was… interesting, to say the least. They were working and each giving their all, and they were gladly helping each other out whenever some assistance was required.
Unsurprisingly, Dawn was most of the time staying on the sidelines and mostly watching the two monster scientists, waiting patiently for one of them to ask for her help on something that would keep her busy for the next few minutes because it would happen to be a step that would require her to hold something firmly so the other one could focus on a precise task or something of the like — so either way, she was either waiting in a corner, or waiting by holding something still or carrying stuff around in the basement so the two others could focus on their tasks at hand. Still, she was docile and had pretty much expected this outcome, and she was happy to be of help without being too much of a nuisance or taking too much space when her help was not required.

She was bored, but then again, she was good at waiting when she knew for a fact that it was the wisest thing to do.

All in all, everything was going smoothly…

“hey intern, i need the qm recalibratin tangler.”

Alphys rolled her eyes, sighing with little conviction. “She’s not an intern, Sans.”

… So smoothly, it appeared that they felt the need to spice things up themselves by finding various and unnecessary ways to create some playful, ironic bickering.

“is she a professional technician? does she have any experience whatsoever in entanglement physics or does she have any idea what she’s doing?”

The skeleton’s grin was definitely the one of a troll who wanted nothing but to playfully mess with the people around him even if they were his friends, because of no other motive but pure boredom. Seeing the lack of verbal answer from both girls, he shrugged trollesquely.

“so she’s an intern. also, where’s that tangler at?”

Dawn sighed. “I would give it to you, but… The heck is that supposed to be? I don’t even have a clue what it’s supposed to look like.”

Alphys rummaged through her box for a few seconds, then pulled out a small tool that she held in victory. “Oh, here it is.”

The human blinked. “That… looks like a screwdriver. Why don’t you just call it a screwdriver?”
“why don’t you call a toaster an ‘oven’?”

“Duh. ‘Cause it makes toast.”

“then ya got your answer. damn are interns dumb. what do they teach ya kids in schools nowadays.”

Dawn sent him a death glare, muttering with spite: “… I’ll just keep calling it a screwdriver.”

Sans had started it, without surprise, but Alphys and Dawn were quick to find their own ways to chat or verbally prank him in return. As long as this did not affect the quality of their work, the casual banter and jokes were perfectly welcome and actually helped lift everyone’s spirits.

When the human teenager gave Sans this screwdriver odd magic tool, the one thing she had definitely not expected when watching him use it led her to ponder a few more issues regarding her current situation; she did not have that many better things to do, anyway.

The skeleton pretended not to see her watching, or at least not to be bothered by it; as he brought his seat closer to his desk and adjusted a magnifying lens so it could focus on a certain part of the circuitry he was about to work on, he hovered his tool closer and, in a second, small flashes of white emerged then vanished all around his hands.

It took a few dozen seconds of mesmerized inspection before she could finally confirm that those little ghastly, somewhat solid white lights that were flying around at high speed and carving patterns in the metal board as easily as if it were butter, were actually magic bullets.

This observation led to a long list of unspoken questions.

She wondered whether these bullets were created and directed through that whatever-it-was-called tool thing, or if Sans was making them himself.

Seeing how he was making some motions with his tool that did not seem to be in relation with the movements the bullets were following, it appeared that Sans really was the one creating and controlling them all by himself; she tried to give a closer look at those bullets in order to see if they could be just really tiny bones, but they were less than half an inch long and they were moving way too fast for her to see anything more than just a blur of light.
Seeing magic bullets had first frightened her on instinct, and just like during that moment the previous night when Alphys had lost her cool, she wondered how they could appear outside of battle. Then again, she remembered that Undyne could totally summon as many magic spears as she wanted while in the overworld, and effectively use them for things other than mere battle: although that was a very questionable choice, she was able to use one to stir dry pasta in a pan. So, maybe no FIGHT was initiated as long as these bullets were left alone to do what the monster who summoned them wanted them to do…?

She wondered if the entire world would turn monochrome whenever a FIGHT was initiated, the same way it was represented both in the game and in some fanarts and animations, and part of her was tempted to trigger one just to satisfy this curiosity… But, nah, that wasn’t worth the risk and waste of time this would be to do something so stupid. Curiosity was a very strong motivator, but hardly ever a worthy motivation by itself.

Also, she soon remembered that during Undyne’s date, Frisk could hold her spear however they wanted, and no FIGHT was triggered as long as Undyne was the one who initiated the idea; so maybe the intent was also required in order to start the FIGHT, if it weren’t the only trigger instead of the contact with the bullet…?

That was probably up for debate. Maybe she would ask Sans or Alphys later, at a time when they wouldn’t be so focused on their advanced magic-y science stuff.

Another question that immediately went over her mind was: “Aren’t bullets only meant for fighting?”

Could it be that monsters were actually using bullets, or maybe their magic in general, for much more mundane usages than just the occasional FIGHT? Her mind was conflicted between the part that was thinking that, since they had these magic powers, obviously they would want to use them whenever they felt like it due to how useful it could be; and the part that was trying to make some sense out of Undertale’s gameplay and just how it was impacting these monsters’ mundane life.

Not once since she arrived did she notice anything that would undeniably prove to her that she was inside a video game, apart from the fact that duh, she was surrounded by the game’s characters and the landscapes of the game’s Underground, and even though Sans and Alphys looked incredibly realistic, the fact that the game was controlling this world was all she really needed to remember that this world’s rules of physics were different than hers.

She had never seen any floating buttons giving her options she could make, there were no dialogue boxes, and she had never seen any ‘screen mode’ other than the classic overworld one; but maybe Sans and Alphys had just made sure that she would stay away from gameplay elements as much as possible for her own safety… or for theirs, too, maybe. Maybe they weren’t trusting her completely yet, especially if she was supposed to be a ‘Player’ and could have more options than they did, or
When she had asked him for details in the morning, Sans did tell her (reluctantly) that her SOUL was supposed to be about four times stronger than a regular human’s was. Adding that to the fact that she was most probably older than Frisk and that, during this Run, a kid had been able to cause so much pain and destruction… She had no idea what kind of disaster she could cause herself if she snapped, but she was very glad that she, at least, trusted herself to have enough mental health to stay pacifistic all the way. Because **duh**. Who would be crazy enough to murder these guys **while** being fully aware that they were sentient and asked for nothing but freedom and peace?

Seeing that *maybe* her staring was in fact distracting Sans, she decided to slowly walk away and give him some space so he could keep working quietly; the gesture seemed to indeed let him relax a little bit. Was he anxious about her proximity to the bullets, maybe? Yeah, maybe she should have kept her distance since the start; his work looked like it was all about precision, but maybe controlling these bullets’ trajectories like this was harder when they were so small, and potentially sharp. She probably **should** have realized sooner just how difficult this specific task was.

As soon as the small buzzing sound of the tiny bullets carving the board stopped, Sans pulled the lens away and he turned around with an expression that immediately revealed what he was about to do:

“*welp. this is gettin a bit too quiet.*” he affirmed in a resolute, joking sigh. “*who’s for puttin on some more background music?*”

“I veto all Undertale OST and fan songs.” Alphys retorted immediately, without even looking away from her work.

“Ditto.” the human added, just as quickly.

The two girls heard a muttered curse and they snickered in unison. There was no further opposition to their conditions, so soon Dawn started her playlist of random songs that had nothing to do with the game and that hopefully did not include too much meme material.

“you think you’re so clever, huh.” Sans grumbled humorously. “al, you done with your part of the motherboard?”

“Almost.” she confirmed while nodding.
Dawn realized that it was finally the time when Sans would remove that purplish blanket in the back of the room, which meant that it was finally the time when she would discover just what was beneath it. Just like that, the skeleton’s left hand grabbed one corner and after a swift pull, the whole fabric tumbled to the floor.

The teenager blinked in shock.

“Wait, what the…” Her eyes zigzagged horizontally for a few seconds. “There’s two of them?”

“duh.” He rolled his eyes overdramatically, grinning jokingly at her ignorance. “how else do you think i brought you here? i know my shortcuts are great, but don’t overestimate them. interdimensional travel’s still out of my reach without some help.”

“I… kinda just assumed that you used your time machine, to be honest.” she answered sheepishly.

The look in his eye-sockets seemed to tell that he wanted so badly to start some scientific rant about how stupid it was to think that a time machine could do some space travel or something like this, but he quickly sighed and decided against it, instead muttering something among the lines of “ain’t that easy, bud. that’s not how it works.”

“anyway, looks like we’ve got some time before al’s done with her part. somethin tells me you’d like some more explainin’ in the meantime. don’t you?”

“I, uh…” Dawn was soon reminded of all the theories regarding the potentially depressing implications behind this machine and what exactly it could have meant for him. Should she really go on and make him talk about what was very likely to be some painful memories…? “I w- wouldn’t want to impose, but…”

“you’re curious about it.” He shrugged, closing his sockets and chuckling lazily. “ehh, it’s cool. i mean, i still owe you some answers after draggin’ you all this way, right?” He winked. “’sides, it’s actually nice that you seem interested in this stuff.”

“My best friend loves physics. Probably because of her dad.” she answered with an awkward smile. “So… I don’t understand a lot of it, but it’s hard not to be curious at least a little when she’s so passionate about it all the time. Maybe her passion’s contagious or whatever. Also, I think she’s jealous
that I’m better at math than she is. Ha.”

“you’re good at math?” he raised a nonexistent eyebrow in surprise.

“It’s just that it’s her weak point and I’m not too bad.” she pouted, looking away. “Doesn’t mean I like it. Math is dumb and unimaginative.”

The monster snickered. “i disagree with that on a lot of levels, but that’s your opinion i guess.”

He stayed still next to her, as they both kept staring at the two machines standing side by side, now in silence. After a few more seconds, Sans invited her to look at the one on the left with a wide nod from his skull.

“That’s the one that brought you here.” he calmly explained while gesturing it with a lazy hand wave.

The gigantic monstrosity was much bigger than the other, towering them with almost ten-feet-tall, dark thick pipes, and long wires strangling an approximately human-sized cavity surrounded by what was likely to be the generator. She had guessed that inviting people into another (virtual?) reality would require a lot of energy and means… but still.

All she could see there was that he really had put a lot of effort into that project. Besides… She wondered how it could have possibly worked. She was certain that bringing actual matter inside a virtual reality was not supposed to be possible, so… Had he used that machine to somehow recreate a body to store her consciousness or something…? The more she thought about it, the more her parallel with The Matrix seemed to be the explanation that made the most sense to her.

This also raised the question of what happened to her actual body back in her own world. Sans had assured her that she would be able to go back safe and sound as soon as he was done, but… How did that work? Was her real body in a coma or something? If she was meant to stay here for at least a few weeks, shouldn’t that be a problem for her health? Could it be that by now, her parents had sent her comatose body to a hospital or something…?

Yikes, that was a creepy thought. Part of her forcedly reminded herself that Sans had promised that she would be fine. So, she had trouble understanding how he would keep his promise, but she reasoned that she probably just wasn’t examining the situation under the right perspective, which would explain why she had missed some key details.

One of those key details could just as well be the answer to the following question: did time even
work the same way in both worlds? In the plot of most of the fanfictions she knew about where the setting would be somewhat similar to her current situation, most of these stories ended with some sort of justification as to why nobody from the player’s world ever got to question or even notice anything: the fact that it had all been some sort of lucid dream overnight, the fact that somehow the entirety of the story had occurred in the span of just a few minutes at best due to some weird, faulty relativity physics…

Dawn used to think of this kind of plot conclusion as a cheap tactic or excuse that would allow the authors writing these stories not to involve anyone from the player’s world, but now…? She actually hoped that this cheap tactic would be what reality had in store for her, because she certainly did not want anyone to worry about her, and because she was not ready to explain anyone what exactly would have happened to her in the meantime. Especially not if the police was to be involved. That would be awkward.

Maybe she would just literally find herself waking up in her bedroom, her slobbering face resting at a painful angle against the keyboard, now with imprints of keys and random letters on her forehead or something, and then realize that practically no time had passed at all since her kidnapping. That would be embarrassing, but that would also be the most convenient solution both regarding the problems of health and trauma from her family, and the one of finding a proper way to tell them what happened.

If hardly any time had passed for them, so much that they wouldn’t even have had the time to realize that she was gone, maybe there wouldn’t be anything to explain at all.

She didn’t have time to mentally gossip much further though, because Sans had already moved on with his explanations and was now entirely focused on the other block of steel and iron. It appeared that the machine was purring, as if it were already working; but soon he went to flip a few switches, and the noise stopped promptly as all the indicator lights turned off.

“as for this one… well, you know it already. that’s what we’re gonna work on today.” His wide smile was shining with hope. “it was fully functional, a long time ago. still kinda is. it got caught in an accident at some point, but we really just need to fix a few old bruises and then find a power source strong enough, and it’s good to go. it’s gonna take some time, but… well. if it weren’t for time jumpin back every now and then, i would’ve totally been able to fix it a while ago. it’s not like it’s gonna be actually hard to do it now.”

She was certain that he was making it sound a lot easier than it would really be, but seeing how they had been working so far, she fully trusted him. She, personally, would certainly not be able to understand a lot of what they were going to do, but as a team, they would succeed. With both Sans and Alphys as the monster geniuses working on it at the same time, she knew that they had nothing to worry about.
Speaking of Alphys, she called out to them and let them know that she was done with her part of… whatever she had been doing. They weren’t really explaining much of what their work was for. Well, she couldn’t really blame them: at first they really had tried to tell her the basics, but the fact that they were working on something that was obviously some advanced science stuff even for monsters, and that their technology seemed to include a lot of magic concepts that she was completely unfamiliar with, they soon gave up trying to explain her anything due to the waste of time it was likely to become. Apparently, since they were living in a world where the laws of physics were different, they literally based their science and theories on different laws of physics, magic, or whatever she was supposed to call it. As if listening to human physicists talking about human science weren’t complicated enough.

While Dawn was pondering whether physics was supposed to be a multiversal science or not, Sans left her side to help the lizard scientist move the weird part of machinery she had been working on closer to the big time machine she was examining. She soon pulled herself out of her trance when she noticed their struggle and dashed to their rescue.

One thing she had been shocked to learn was the fact that monsters were incredibly weak physically — at least, Sans and Alphys were. They could work through life without much trouble, but apparently moving heavy stuff around was taking a lot more out of them than she would have expected: even if she considered herself to be far from physically built, she appeared to be a lot stronger than either of them, arguably both of them together, even.

She attributed this to the fact that monsters’ bodies were physically much weaker than humans’ according to the game’s lore; but still, seeing this for herself was concerning. Could they actually injure themselves to a serious degree if they were to carry around something that was too heavy for them? Could such effort… dust them?

One thing was clear, she did not want to find out.

As soon as the part of machinery was carefully laid on the ground, the monsters thanked her like the previous times, and like the previous times she brushed it off, too worried about what could have happened to them if she hadn’t come to help. She theorized that in other facilities where they were constantly building stuff, they probably had some equipment to help them properly, and that it just so happened that Sans did not have that sort of equipment in his basement due to a number of guessable reasons.

The two monsters immediately went to open some panels and connect random colored wires between the original time machine and whatever Alphys had been working on. Sans soon brought the parts he had crafted earlier, and they connected one of them elsewhere on the same machine, probably as a replacement of sorts because he previously removed from the machine a board that looked similar to it, except that it was in pretty bad shape.
Eventually, he went to a certain part of the machine, opened another panel, and motioned her to come to his side. When she arrived and looked, she saw that inside the cavity in the machine stood a rather large, transparent can containing some strange liquid-looking… thing.

“that’s the dt battery system.” he said, answering her implied question.

“DT… As in ‘determination’?”

“yep. as far as we know, that’s the only thing that can let things or people remain unchanged through time jumps – i mean resets” (he seemed to have corrected himself reluctantly) “or even cause them.”

That machine was running on determination…? The more you know. Then again, time machine, in the Undertale universe. Of course determination was the most obvious choice for the engine’s fuel or whatever.

Now that she was thinking about it, she realized that there really were only two functional machines in the room, one responsible for her presence here, and the other supposed to control time or whatever. But… What about Sans’s memory? She remembered that he had mentioned that he had… “manually saved his memory”, or something like that. Which to her meant that he had probably used some sort of machine for that too, and seeing that Sans had actually shut down the time machine just a few minutes earlier… Could it be that this was what he was already using to save his memory as well? She theorized that in order for his machine to be able to save his memory throughout time, said machine needed to be present during each time loop as well. So, seeing that according to the game this was the only machine supposed to be here from the start… Maybe it wasn’t too far-fetched.

For once… She wanted to make sure. She still had a lot of questions, after all, and maybe thinking everything through all by herself was a bit stupid, when she could just ask the guy that was standing right next to her and had all the answers she wanted.

“I just thought…” she started awkwardly, then bit her lip. “It’s just… Is this what you’re using to remember the timelines?”

The wide eye-sockets and bright glowing dots locked on her showed that, first of all, her deduction was most probably correct, and that, second, he definitely had not expected her to be able to make that deduction.
“well… yeah. good job on guessin’ that.” He sighed. “you prolly know what happens if you mix monsters and determination—” (she flinched) “— yeah you see what i’m talkin’ about. so if the machine’s the one holding on to it… it can save anything for me.”

He looked uncomfortable. A dark part of her mind realized that since the machine was now turned off, and since it was supposed to save his memory, it was one of the rare moments when Sans’s mind was vulnerable to potential Resets. She was the one able to Reset if she wanted to, and she had just found out his greatest weakness.

She gulped. Now more than ever, it was definitely not the time to screw up.

“I wasn’t supposed to know that, was I…” she winced, sending him an apologetic look, then sighed tensely. “I-it’s okay, I understand why you wouldn’t want me to find out. I’m sorry I…”

He chuckled awkwardly, shaking his skull. “n-nah, i… really just forgot to tell ya. i mean, never intended to hide that or anythin, i would’ve told you if you asked, but there’s just…”

She clenched her teeth and fists in a mixture of feelings that she had trouble identifying. Was her patience faltering? She was not sure. The only thing she was sure about was: that was enough.

“Sans. Look.” He turned his anxious gaze towards her, and she returned him a pair of upset, yet determined eyes. “I know I’m… well. I’m really curious, about a lot of stuff. I have a lot of questions. But… It’s okay if you want to have your secrets. I still don’t know everything about you, and even if there are theories and stuff back in my world, and even if I really want to ask you about it, it’s just… It’s not fair, you know? I just… know too much already.” She bit her lip again and looked to the side. “So… I’ll always be here if you want to talk about some stuff or whatever, because maybe I know enough so I can understand how you feel or whatever, but… I only want you to talk about it if you want to. Okay?”

There was a long pause. Those two white glowing pupils kept staring at her and slightly trembled, but soon they went to look back at the machine and his frozen smile expanded a bit, as it finally became a lot more relaxed and genuinely relieved.

“… thanks, kid. really means a lot comin’ from you.”

She tried to give him an honest, encouraging smile in return, although a little part of it was strained. Maybe she felt already that leaving him alone with his past would be harder than she made it sound, and she hated it. Being mature could be so hard and frustrating sometimes, but… This was the right thing to do, wasn’t it?
Even if it hurt, maybe she had to try to weight out which amount of pain would hurt more: her pain of knowing he was hiding things from her and that he didn't trust her, or his pain of feeling intruded on, on what was likely to be already painful parts of his life? Even though she could not assess properly the second option due to not knowing the details of what it was all about, it still was easy to compare the two possibilities.

“So, um, I don’t want to ruin a moment, but is the container coming already…?”

Sans and Dawn were pulled out of their thoughts when Alphys awkwardly called out to them, reminding them of what they were supposed to do before they started chatting around.

“Oh, right.” the skeleton chuckled. He pulled a small tool out of nowhere and quickly moved it around the glass can, untangling the few wires connected to it and removing the screws keeping it in place. “We need to bring it over. Thing is, it’s a bit heavy, so…”

“No worries, I got it.” She grinned, then seized the container with both hands and swiftly, but carefully raised it from its original location. She winced a bit. “Oof—okay, it is a bit heavier than I thought, but I’m fine. Where do you guys want me to put it?”

“Just here is fine, don’t worry.” the lizard scientist smiled, pointing the floor against a corner of the machine and by her side.

After smiling and nodding in understanding, the human secured the translucent can in her hands and squeezed it tightly against her chest… But that was when it happened.

Whatever happened, it happened fast. Dawn hardly had the time to turn around and start walking towards the designated destination, when a flash of light occurred. The human teenager cried in shock and pain, there was the sound of a heavy object falling, and before anyone could barely process that something had happened, let alone comprehend what had happened, the two dumbstruck monsters were facing a whimpering human lying on the floor and clutching her chest in pain, and a glass container rolling on the floor with a fracture that let its contents slowly ooze out and leave a growing trail of shifting drops.

Okay, now that’s new. What just happened?!

“Shit!” Sans was the first to react, and judging by his vocabulary, he was probably not in the state of mind to think. “No-no-no-no-no…”
Surprisingly enough, instead of focusing on the container, he rushed towards the human and let Alphys take care of the leaking determination instead, as he carefully kept his distance with it and even backed away on instinct when he feared he might have accidentally stepped on some of it.

Dawn looked groggy and in pain, at best. He struggled to help her sit up and face him, but it did not seem to help at all as the cracks in her grimace only deepened in response. He carefully helped her lie back down and apologized.

She had trouble thinking. She had no idea what had happened, but she was certain she had let go off what she was supposed to hold on, and she heard panicked voices around her, and she remembered that what she was holding was some liquid determination or whatever, and she probably had messed up pretty badly by letting go off it, and she did not know what happened but there was something and it hurt…

Yet, somehow, suddenly, that something in her chest felt something that wasn’t pain. It was not enough to soothe her and make her forget about the pain, but it helped a lot by making it at least a lot more bearable, and gradually she was able to regain at least some kind of control over her breathing and movements. Her eyes felt a bit wet. Had she been crying from the pain? When finally she opened her eyes if ever so slightly, the wetness made her vision blurry, but the first thing she saw was a skull looming over her. It was Sans, wasn’t it? But why did she feel like his pupils weren’t supposed to look so bright and colored…?

When Sans saw her eyes open, he did not wait any longer.

“dawn, can you hear me?” he hurriedly called out. There were suddenly three small flashes of white that flickered in panic just behind his shoulders. “how many bones do you see?”

Oh… So he had summoned a few bone bullets, huh. Some part of her wanted to feel threatened by the view of giant floating bones roaming right above her, but maybe she was too dazed to feel it. Maybe her brain was not able to trigger the right chemicals to raise any red flags, whether she logically should feel threatened or not.

Either way, she tried to strengthen her grip on reality as best she could, by focusing on the simple task that had been given to her. But… was it really that simple?

“Uuuuh…” She looked confused and unsure, thinking hard. “S-should I count you in it? I-i’m not sure h-how many b-bones there are in your body…”

Sans stared at her for a few seconds with a deadpan look. The bone-bullets vanished into thin air, then he released his grip on her arms and plunged his hands in his hoodie’s pockets, turning around towards Alphys.
“… well, she’s fine.” he grumbled, rolling his pupils.

Alphys was crouching over the drops of determination on the floor with the open container by her side, and she seemed to be using some form of magic in order to tentatively guide the liquid back into the container without touching it directly. Needless to say, it was a slow and rather ineffective process. Dawn wondered if Sans’s blue magic could have been more useful there, assuming that it worked the way she imagined it. Which… was probably false, because the game never really made it look that much like any sort of actual telekinesis. Or did it…? Ugh, she probably wasn’t in the capability of thinking about this sort of thing right now.

“Sans, this isn’t funny.” the lizard scolded. “Either you stay with her, or come and help me clean this up.”

“i know, geez.” He sighed, then bent back over the human’s head and his gaze was more intense and focused. “seriously, how’re you feeling?”

Dawn scrunched up her face in odd, confused expressions, as if she was not sure herself. Still, she soon muttered an unsure “… Better?” as an attempt to reassure him. She frowned and tried to move around, so Sans carefully helped her sit up once more. This time, it appeared that it was not as painful as the previous attempt.

However, as she was sitting up and looked down so she could find support on the ground, her eyes met a diffused, wide cyan light radiating from her chest.

She looked up. Sans’s pupils glowed the same color.

She looked down again. She brought both hands over the light as if to try to shield it from view and her face blushed.

Was that her SOUL?

“it looks okay enough… i think.” he muttered tensely, apparently still worried. His glowing pupils moved to look at her in the eye, although they kept their current aspect. Eye contact with a pair of cyan rings was weird. “still. you got any idea what happened?”

She shook her head nervously. It felt light. “No, I have no idea…” She blinked and stared again at her chest, then gulped uncomfortably. “Can you, not, do that?”

The monster stared in confusion, then followed her eyes to look at the big cyan heart-shaped shadow she was ineffectively trying to hide with her hands. He blinked in realization, but did not seem that fazed by it.
“... oh. right.” He blinked again, and when his bony eyelids opened, his pupils were back to their original white color and regular shape. He grinned jokingly. “what, never seen your soul before?”

She merely shook her head tensely, pursing her lips. “It’s… big.” she grimaced.

“well, it’s bigger than the ones you’re supposed to see around here, that’s for sure.” he nodded and shrugged casually, still smiling. “four times stronger than the norm, remember?”

Alphys came over, as she was apparently done cleaning up what could be fixed of the incident and went to crouch down next to Sans. She whispered to him that she would take it from here, and the human teenager felt reassured to see what she assumed to be the closest thing to a doctor among monsters. She was not sure whether anything severe really had happened, but the event had been shocking enough as it was, and now she needed answers.

“So... Something happened to my s-soul?” she asked immediately and fearfully.

Being hurt physically was one thing— especially if the body she had right now was not her real one, but rather a virtual recreation of it or whatever it was like in the movies. But... Now, receiving damage to her SOUL? She was not sure what the consequences really were. Maybe she would just be healed and her HP would go back to its maximum or something as easy as that. Or maybe it was actually serious. Sans and Alphys had looked panicked as if it were serious.

Hardly listening to her question, the lizard scientist merely answered “I’ll be the judge of that.”, as she had already grabbed her shoulders and made her stand straight, staring directly at her chest without wasting time. When that weird feeling from a few minutes earlier came back to wrap itself around her chest and Dawn saw weird lights flickering around Alphys’s head, she understood that she was using her magic to stare at her SOUL again.

... Damn that was awkward. Was this something common among monsters? Did they just look at each other’s SOULs just like that whenever they felt like it? Maybe it would have been more polite if they asked, at least, wouldn’t it?

Judging by the look on Alphys’s face as soon as she caught a glimpse of her SOUL, apparently she had never seen anything like it. She had studied Asgore’s six SOULs before, so maybe it had to do with the fact that hers was stronger and bigger, maybe...? She hoped that it was because of her surprise of seeing for the first time an aberration of nature, rather than because of something severe that should not have happened to abovementioned aberration of nature.

After what felt like forever, the monster sighed and closed her eyes in what seemed to be relief.
The human felt the grip on her SOUL loosen, then gradually vanish.

“Well… It looks fine for now, at least.” the scientist mumbled. “I would’ve preferred taking a full examination to be sure, but I’d need you to be at the lab for that, so I suppose that’s not an option. I guess we’ll just have to keep an eye on it to make sure it doesn’t worsen.”

Dawn gulped and sent the two monsters a distressed look. “So… You guys don’t know what happened?”

“Not at all.” Alphys shook her head shamefully.

“not a clue.” Sans added gravely. “it never happened before, even when human souls were around. so i don’t know what your soul did, but that’s new.”

When she saw the looks on the monsters’ faces, Dawn looked down shamefacedly. They seemed to be more worried about her than about the incident she had caused, and that was very sweet of them, but… What about the incident? Maybe someone at least had to worry about that part, too.

“D-did something happen to the container? Did we lose something important?” she asked guiltily.

Alphys snorted weakly, brushing off her question as if it were stupid. “It’s fine, don’t worry about that. Equipment breaks all the time in the lab, that just happens.”

The skeleton shook his skull heavily. “we didn’t lose much and the container’s easy to replace.” he assured. His sockets opened and the glowing pellets stared back at her. “you, on the other hand… quite a bit harder to replace your soul.”

There was a tense silence. Maybe, after all, she was also considered to be part of the equipment, and a very rare part at that. She was soon reminded that she was not just a possible friend to them, but first and foremost their last hope. Whether they cared about her or not, they probably could not afford to lose her, because something terrible would happen if they did. The human gulped, not daring to look away from the determination can. After half a minute, Alphys was the first one to regain her speech as she sent her a worried look and scrunched up expression.

“Listen, Dawn, m-maybe it’s best if you…”
“Yeah.” She sighed deeply, then nodded blankly but frantically, her face still pale. “I’ll just... go upstairs.”

Sans nodded sharply. “good idea yeah.”

“I’ll… make us some brunch?” she said tentatively, forcibly tearing upwards the corners of her mouth. “How’s that sound?”

“Brunch sounds nice.” Alphys smiled sheepishly.

Dawn sent them one last look before leaving the basement, silently wishing that they could manage the rest even if she weren’t there to help. She hoped they wouldn’t have too many heavy objects to move around.

Noon was near when Sans walked upstairs to see how the human was doing; she had been left alone for hardly twenty minutes, but still, after she left the atmosphere in the basement was simply… different. He didn’t know whether it would have been the same with or without Dawn among them, because the discomfort was due to the incident either way and her presence downstairs probably wouldn’t have changed much, but… Well. Maybe he just needed some fresher air after spending hours working in a confined environment. After everything that happened, he really was tired, too. Maybe he just needed a break.

He had just reached the living room when he heard some knocking on the main door; without thinking, he sighed and slowly walked to it before opening—

… Wait. Who could be at the main door, in this timeline, at this moment, when Alphys was downstairs, Dawn was in the kitchen, and everyone else was supposed to be anywhere but here?

Well, he had already turned the handle. It was too late to pretend that nobody was home.

“Good morning, Sans.” went the cheerful, totally oblivious voice of Grillby. “It’s been a while.”

Sans was hit by the irrepressible urge to face-palm.

When he had sent that text mentioning lunch, had Grillby taken it literally? As in, right the next day and in Snowdin?
“… h-heya, grillbs.” He grinned forcefully, hiding his nervousness as best he could and praying that nobody would appear in the frame of the door while he tried to shield the view of the inside of the house. Which, given his small stature, was a losing battle. “what… brings you here? if you don’t mind me askin.”

“Everybody is coming back. Didn’t you hear the King last week?” Seeing the skeleton’s horrified look, which he mistook for mere surprise, the fire elemental thought a bit more. “... Oh. Now that I’m thinking about it, you probably weren’t there when we talked about it.”

_Everybody was coming back._

Sans had no idea what to do with this revelation, except from desperately trying to tone down the “we’re doomed” thought that repeated itself in cycles in his skull. That had never happened before… But then again, as far as he could remember, that was the only time the world took so long before going back to the beginning, especially in a timeline during which the kid had died, so…

Still. Shouldn’t _Alphys_ have warned him about this?!

He was going to have a word with her, as soon as the immediate problem in front of him was taken care of.

“In any case,” Grillby continued joyfully while pulling out a hamburger and a bottle of ketchup from his bag, “since we’re all back in town, I wanted to give you a small surprise and encouragement. It must have been hard for you to stay here all alone. Maybe you should join us tonight, we planned a small party for our return; nothing too fancy, it’s just so we could spend some time together after what happened.”

“that’s… oh geez.” Sans seized the gifts with clumsy bony hands, knowing less and less how to react. “um… thanks. i… that’s really, nice of you?”

The taller monster chuckled deeply, readjusting his glasses. “You’re very welcome. I missed you too, you know. During these hard times, we must... stick together.” He brought his hands behind his back and waited in front of the door, still. Seeing that Sans was not moving either… he finally seemed to understand that he was actually not as welcome as he had anticipated. “Um...... Is this the wrong moment?”

Sans’s expression lit up in fake realization. “actually, it’s the… generator. it’s unstable. i should prolly go back to it before it, y’know, explodes or somethin.”

Come on, this is _so_ easy. Everyone knows that’s her cue.
Dawn chose this exact moment to excitedly leave the kitchen with a large plate in her hands and a smile that brightened as soon as she saw Alphys walk up the stairs.

“Oh hey!” she called out to the lizard scientist with enthusiasm, not having given a single glance at the front door. “There’s almost nothing but Bolognese spaghetti in the fridge so I wanted to try something a bit different, but all I could find was some random stuff and Pesto sauce. So I made Pesto sandwiches. It doesn’t taste as bad as it sounds.” She smiled and took one of the small sandwiches in question, biting into it and…

… and finally noticing the two other monsters present in the room. She froze in place and widened her eyes, barely managing to keep her hold on the plate.

Grillby remained perfectly still, facing a human standing almost twice as tall as the one who had been witnessed to murder every single monster that met its path, wearing an apron way too large for her, having just attempted to cook, and having just admitted to living quietly in this house as if it had been a perfectly normal habit for at least some time.

Grillby lowered his invisible eyes to stare back at Sans, who was somehow visibly sweating and smiling way too widely.

“............. I suppose this means you didn’t make it in time for the generator.”

Read via Screenshots Here (full formatting but may encounter loading issues)

Chapter End Notes

Just a bit late for a note, but if you're interested, I also started recently a tumblr blog focusing entirely on this story, available right here! For now it only contains the chapters, but if my free time and health allow it, I might actually start putting some more interesting content there, such as random sketches, drawings and whatnots. Also, no matter what, you can also ask your questions there! Or here in the comments below, that works too. You choose! Just remember that no matter what, I always love to chat so I'll always be here to answer you :D
Act 1, Scene 4.2

Chapter Notes

Ok, so, first chapter to break my "10k words per chapter MAXIMUM" rule, by more than 3000 words. I'm sorry, I did my best, I tried, I removed a LOT of stuff that made the chapter even longer, I wish I could get the transition between the last two scenes better even though it would only have made the chapter about 500-2000 words longer, but even with this, it's still long xD Hopefully though, it'll be worth both the wait and the length.

Learn When to Quit

— Act 1 —

Don’t Let Him Find Out

Scene 4.2

» Read the PDF version here! «

» Read on tumblr here! «

This is the main index where you can choose which way you wish to read the chapter.

Read via Screenshots Here (full formatting but may encounter loading issues)
Read Plain Text Here (formatting limited to what AO3 can do)
"I'm going to make a wild guess and assume you didn't plan to tell anyone about it."

Yep, Grillby was pissed. It was high time Sans said something to salvage the situation with his usual great eloquence.

"not... really, no."

Aw, come on. I know you can do better than that.

If anyone had ever doubted Sans’s ability to breathe, that was the moment when the most obvious confirmation was made that yes, magic skeleton monsters could, and probably needed, to breathe. Especially when the mentioned skeleton was stuck in a sticky situation where one of his oblivious acquaintances was about to have his mind blown in the worst way possible, by the imminent death of another of his acquaintances by his own hand, or by the hand of another monster. As soon as he would set an angry mob after them.
The choice was supposed to be easy. Blowing mind would not even have lasting consequences, time-jump "Reset" he had planned on causing should erase the impending existential crisis and loss of sanity—not to mention that, right now elemental’s sanity seemed to be already hanging by a thread and ready to be lost either way.

But, still. This choice meant that they would have to deal with said existential crisis for as long as they would before they could fix everything, and although Giselle quite the chill guy, this was bound to be a major headache. Not to mention the fact that before dealing with existential crisis per se, they would have to find a way to bring up the topic in the first place, and bring him into favorable conditions for him to listen to their explanation; instead of doing what he was certainly thinking was the most reasonable choice in such situation, that was to take care of the obvious public danger in the area, whether pacifistically or... possibly less so.

Okay. Start small.

"uuh... yeah, haha. heh." Sans mimed some coughing. "um, grillbs, this is dawn. dawn, gran..."

The human looked surprised by his course of action, and gladly followed his lead as she smiled and made a quick once over with his face.
and an encouraging small wave with her free hand.

Grillby did not move an inch, although his fire did bit. Defensively, or as an intimidation trick, she went

“..... Sans. I have known you for a three years. I really want to be you’re not completely out of your mind. The former barman sighed deeply, bringing a finger to the alleged location of his forehead. Rubbing it tiredly. “But the more I think how much I really know about you, more I realize. I don’t know you at

“I-look, uh... long story short, stuff happened of stuff.” Sans did his best to keep a confident contact, but he was failing nonetheless. “may could, uh... you wanna come inside? we can seat, have a nice chat, and explain all this... so

He remained perfectly still, emphasizing his imbalance skepticism. “You mean “stuff” like you that you promised countless times somehow pay itself as soon as time jump back, all the nonsense you say you’re drunk about paradoxes in parallel universes, undetectable anomalies, mad scientists dying in their own or the Timeline Ketchup Incident?”
Sans grew pale. “please don’t bring up that. i swear it has nothin to do with it.” he said hurriedly. Then he paused, thinking thoroughly about what he had heard and shocked to realize that Grill had caught up on that much throughout the years, though he did not seem to take any of it seriously. 

“in fact it’s, uh, none of the above. it’s complete bullshit, but, i swear we can explain if you just—”

“You can explain why you favored staying here and looking after a human in times of helping us survive all this even though the last human you ass decimated most of the kingdom and of my regular patrons and dear friends he interrupted bluntly, crossing his arms. He added for emphasis: “Our. Dear friends.

... Yeah. A majority of the victims from Snowdin were of the Royal Guard, and a huge part of the Royal Canine Unit. Sans realized this was the first time that he gave these guys even a single thought, and last time was long before the beginning of this time. Maybe he really had stopped caring a lot more. He wanted to admit... yikes. He did like these guys, though. Ugh. He really hoped that once all this mess would...
he’d be able to care about everyone again, and for
But in the meantime... What was he supposed to
Behind him in the living room, Alphys was still
the doorframe on top of the stairs, and could be
considered to be in the room at all. She was frozen,
obviously thinking hard about what she could do to
help, but sadly she had never met this guy face
before and had no idea how to deal with him,
because most of her thoughts were focusing on
simply understand what had happened in the first
Dawn had remained as still as she could be at first,
conclusions to her analysis of the situation still
maybe moving would be the worst possible thing
the moment.

Ugh, of course. Why are the patient ones all
boring? They never do anything! 
But, then again... Sans seemed to be stuck in
an infinite loop, Grillby was not amused, and Al
was giving her panicked looks so her coming to the res
probably not going to happen anytime soon. They
needed a catalyst so time could unfreeze, and possibly
this catalyst had to be someone other than Grillby.

“L-look... H-h-hey.” she called out timidly, not
another hand wave that she wished looked
friendly as she intended it. “I know this sound
e-especially with what’s been going on— I’ll probably don’t know the details of everything.

Sans sent her the distressed “what are you doing?” and this wordless yet passionate moral support quite the fantastic effect of making her realize, first of all, that she had no idea how to answer this question, and just how badly she screwed up.

Then again, maybe the skeleton’s mere act of turning his skull around to give her that look had been a mistake.

A burning dry breeze brushed her cheek and swept out of the way of the surrounding howling wind, by a thundering crashing sound in the wall behind them. Seeing the large magic bullets that were now floating behind the fire elemental’s back, Dawn understood this was his way of politely asking her to mind her business, and that at least he had been enough of a gentleman to give her a fair warning instead of example, immediately aiming for her. Either that was terrible, but given the distance between them, she wanted to think that the first option was the more likely.

Either way, in response to this, she awkwardly pursed her lips, gestured to zip her mouth shut, and carefully step back. This seemed to appease the monster a bit because, although the bullets remained, they
to lose some consistence and somewhat shrink. Alphys judged this to be the moment to take action. She sneakedily walked to the human’s side before ushering him back down in the basement and closing the door to block their path. During the procedure, the two other girls merely stared at the girls’ antics, their heads slowly turning to follow them with their nonexistent eyes. As soon as they vanished from view, Sans made it clear he had not taken Grillby’s exploitation of his singleness as a distraction lightly.

“what the hell, man? you thought we’d attack on sight or what?!”

“Well, not you.” he conceded calmly, though the palpable hesitation in his wording and invisible grins conveyed easily his implied doubts. Thankfully, saying these words, his bullets vanished completely.

“... heh. y’know, it’s funny, ’cause I’m the one with the highest kill count in this house.” the sky said carefully and with noticeable regret, but also with a grave tone and a slight frown on his darkening sockets. “well technically I’ve just been killin the same kid over and over so it’s debatable whether that counts as one or as however many times that makes by my count. Either way, that doesn’t change anything.
looks like your instincts aren’t workin right tho

This seemed to effectively freeze Grillby in place. He took this not-so-subtle threat figuratively or, it appeared that, unfortunately, he did not interpret it as an attempt at a sarcastic joke the way the skeleton originally meant it. Granted, Sans was now pissed, so his cryptic wording and ticked off temper did convey the initial meaning, which was: ‘appearance deceiving, so try to open your eyes and keep an open mind.’ Instead, although he had refused to believe it until those last words came out, the fire elemental gathered: an alarming message: Sans was actually a traitor and/or considerably more likely to be mentally ill.

The former bartender was not sure which one of those options was the worst; but no matter the choice, he knew that he could not handle this alone. He needed Grillby’s left foot subtly glided a few inches back, he carefully shifted his weight onto it. And then him turn around and dash towards the rest of the high speed, too little too late.

During the fleeting half second he could afford to think, Sans tried to find a way to stop him that would at once pacifistic, efficient, and subtle. He had to remind himself that using magic would be neither nor subtle. However, considering the next step.
nor subtle. However, considering the next step, it
took too much time to properly avoid hasty decisions.

Grillby was forced to stop in his tracks when the sight of a way too familiar skeleton literally *materialize* 
*front of him*, out of nowhere and without any warning. 
Well, ‘stopping in his tracks’ would not really be 
appropriate wording, since the poor monster did 
not have enough time before the collision to process that 
*stop* in order to avoid colliding with the obstacle. 
The skeleton appeared less than three feet in front of him, 
consequence, collision did occur, and soon both 
characters landed in the snow, one on top of the other.
Well. At least, Sans thought, the attempt to stop 
running had been a... let’s say, half success.

Too shocked by the weirdness of the phenomenon just witnessed, Grillby forgot that he was in a position 
that would have easily allowed him to overpower him 
mentally disoriented friend, and instead he scuttled 
away from him, taken over by a senseless yet overwhelming

“D... Did you just...?” He kept rambling to 
his flames crackling as he turned his head repeatedly 
between Sans’s current location and the fact that 
open doorframe of his house, assessing the distance... 

“How the hell did you... so quickly...?” 
Sans slowly stood up and brushed himself off...
Sans slowly stood up and brushed himself off, tiredly and slightly tilting his skull in slow horror movements. “trust me, that part’s not important."

When he was fully standing and raised his pupils towards him, he met Grillby’s intensely disappointing glare. He face-palmed. “... well, ok, i can totally been able to do that for a while, too. that sound like something important to mention. but that’s not the point.”

Grillby’s stance became tenser and warier. If he were visible, Sans could have seen him squinting.

“Is this really teleporting, or rather, slumbling?”

The skeleton sighed one more time, burying his hands in his hoodie’s pockets and letting his shoulders slump in an attempt to look as harmless and friendly as possible.

“teleporting, grillbs. trust me, i would know it if i had time powers, ‘cause that would’ve been a lot more convenient for, like, literally everything that happened in my life.”

Despite his efforts, once more he had found himself unable to hide his sarcasm and irritation. Of course he was expected such confusion and prejudice to come, expecting the thuận or out of any other monster in general, for that matter. This was the exact reason why he had kept his sequel secret in the first place, after all.
When he saw that his answer didn’t seem to reach an old friend to the slightest, he deadpanned.

“... this isn’t helpin make my case, is it.”

“**No, it isn’t.**” Grillby shook his head sounding almost apologetic in his tone. Almost Sans rubbed his skull exasperatingly. This was going anywhere. “**grillby... please, give us a chance. i know this is crazy, but i SWEAR i can explain.**”

He gave a quick glance at the rest of the town—the local inhabitants and his former neighbors were back and working together to put everything back together, but thankfully they did not seem to be paying much attention for the time being.

“**You say that a lot, **” the barman nodded or “**but you never did tell me anything.**”

“well...” He sighed. Again. “**yeah, fair. but, look at the kind of stuff that i definitely wouldn’t expect you to believe right off the bat— we have a lot to show you, but... i’d really prefer talkin about it indoors if you don’t mind.**” He raised at him a distressed, begging pupils. “**please. al and the others will stay in the basement if you want. i promise, i won’t do anythin, but it’s REALLY important that we keep that a secret.**”
you keep the secret."

"Sans, there is a human living in the house, and the Royal Scientist he has kept this a secret along with..." Judging from his tone and attitude, it was becoming more and more obvious that Grillby’s children were actually starting to falter for good. "Knowing her other secrets were like, I’m afraid it’s a lot more difficult for me to think that there is nothing dangerous with whatever it is you have been keeping all this time. I wouldn’t be surprised if you knew about the Amalgamates, but you didn’t look nearly as surprised as we did during the evacuation."

A shiver ran down Sans’s spine when a dozen soldiers materialized around him. Grillby did not wish to fight, but they were effectively blocking the way to his children.

"Sans, this has gone on long enough. If this really isn’t a danger for you, then prove it. To everyone."

"I can’t!" Sans blurted out in panic. He didn’t have time to regain his composure, or at least attempt to, but in any case he was becoming desperate. "Trust me on this, I’d LOVE to do just that, but keeping secrets sucks, but I know for a fact..."
Keeping secrets sucks. But I know for a fact if some people learn about this, even if I'm LITERALLY working to save the world here, they still won’t listen. And even if that sounds crazy, the KEY part of the plan is that I NEED that hub to stay safe if we wanna save everyone.”

The fire elemental stayed in place, slowly trepidation in concern... But soon he shook his head, sighing in despair. “... I don’t even know... I’m still trying to reason with you.”

The implications in his tone were numerous, and with the growing bullets hovering around them already, it appeared that an actual fight was now and more and more unavoidable. Which is exactly why the first thing he could think about to effectively

In a blink, a bony hand appeared out of nowhere, grabbed Grillby’s arm, and then he suddenly vanishing from view after being yanked by said hand, while he remained in place in the air but quickly started falling to gravity before they imploded into tiny, harmless symbols of magic. Sans froze in place, as he apparently needed to rethink his exact actions and fully process what had happened in the span of the past half second.

Which location did he focus on when he had shot through his shortcut, again? He remembered h...
It took maybe about a full half minute before Grieg could even wrap his mind around what had just happened when he saw the dark landscape of Waterfall, the ever-crushing sound of water near him, and the bioluminescent plant life surrounding what appeared to be a hidden room behind a literal wall of water... Well, he had never been foot in this place in his past, that much was clear; it appeared that when Sans had described his elemental ability as ‘teleporting’, he had not lied after all.

Still. Fire elemental. Surrounded by water. Bad idea.

He pulled out his cell phone, pondering who he should call for help... But then again, when he gave another look at the waterfall, it appeared that there was only one way out of this room other than by going through it, if someone could bring him protection like an umbrella, it would still need to walk directly into the river.
would still need to walk directly into the Hive. He didn’t know how deep it was. So with or without me, there was no way he was going anywhere near the Hive. So... It did appear like his only real way out was literal teleportation, after all. Which meant that the only person he could rely on was the one who had put him in the first place. Just his luck.

Would Sans... really just leave him here? Part of him wanted to hope and have some sort of lingering belief in what he had believed to be a rather funny and clever plan for the past few years, but the more he thought on it, the more his cold reason told him that, despite it, he had just proven to be... Maybe his friend really had dropped him for one at all, in the end. And he was now paying them for his kindness and gullibility. Maybe he should have listened to that human when he had the chance...

Meh, who was he kidding. He wasn’t a murderer. He didn’t have it in him anyway. Maybe it would have been easier if that human did turn out to have done some human stuff. But even if Sans had kept it safe by keeping all the resources to survive, especially after what had happened with the last human. They needed the Surface, more than ever. And they had six souls! Seven, even. He had no bothered to share. Couldn’t he understand that...
bothered to share. Couldn’t he understand that...

Well... It wasn’t like any of this would matter to him. He leaned his back against the wall facing the water, let himself glide against its rocky yet smooth surface, slowly sitting on the floor and pondering his situation. But soon, he just sighed in despair.

What could he do now...? He was definitely stuck.

“Howdy!”

Grillby jumped, then jerked his head towards the direction of that insufferably saccharine voice. Wait, was that talking flower? He hadn’t seen vegetal monsters lately. Probably had to do with living in Snowdin. Snowdin’s weather definitely wasn’t good for them.

Then again, he sensed that there was something unusual about this one. This did not feel like a monster at all, he knew that there was something off about this one, but he couldn’t put his finger on it.

“Boy, isn’t that unexpected.”

Whether the stranger had waited for an answer or not, Grillby didn’t seem to care. Instead, he merely continued to talk to him, with that chirpy, seemingly childish voice:

“You know, I was never interested in you species before. You always stay at your pub and all, it’s boring. I mean, I don’t blame you for that, of course it’s just your job. But you’re quite the chill guy.
it’s just your job. But you’re quite the thing got probably would’ve been a lot more fun to have with earlier if you weren’t always staying the day.” Before the monster could even think of it what it was talking about, the flower beam cut him short, even if he had not even said anything yet. “But now! What a wonderful surprise it is you do new things like this! You’re a GEM, I’ll tell you that. And you know what? That thing you did was entertaining, I feel like rewarding you right now.

An awkward silence fell in the room, save for the sound of the waterfall eternally falling a few feet from them. They seemed to be on a staring contest starting from that point.

... Grillby had so. Many questions.

“... Rewarding me.” he carefully repeated with an emotionless tone after some time, wary and skeptical.

“Yes!” it grinned. “I’m sure you must have a lot of questions about what this mess was aaaaall about, don’t you?” Somehow, even without anything other than its stem to move around, it managed to add some sort of proud pose. “Luckily for you, I happen to know a lot of things about this place. I can answer everything you want.”
The bartender remained entirely still, staring. “........... I was actually expecting to call for help and get me out of here honestly.”

“Psh. Priorities, am I right?” the plant rolled its eyes, laughing as if it had heard something comical. “I’m sure the trashbag will come back and get you, eventually.” It paused to think for a moment, then an evil, mocking smirk appeared on its leaves. “... Unless he doesn’t. In which case, yeah, I’d say you’re in some pretty big trouble right now.”

............. Moving on from the fact that this strange and uncaring creature was not lending the slightest bit of compassion to his situation and that for some reason, it seemed to see it as “entertaining” to an extent important that it was finding some reason to think of it as having... Grillby had no idea what this being, that he was certain was not a monster, was here for, or was interested in. But one thing he could tell was that it was not to be taken lightly. Part of him found himself still hoping that Sari would actually come back, but...

Well, he still had some sort of evil demonic flower distracted for the time being. Maybe playing with it would keep it from having... possibly deranged.
Chatting was harmless; and thankfully, being a Flowey was a synonym to being a great listener, too.

Making it talk should keep it busy for some time. A conversation starter came to his mind naturally:

“You know what Sans is doing. Don’t you?”

Flowey’s grin expanded, demonically slicing his eyes open.

“Ooh, I can tell you a lot about him alright.”

Alphys was freaking out. Sans was walking rapidly. Dawn was waiting patiently but worriedly in a corner.

“You got him stuck behind a WATERFALL!”

Alphys shrieked.

“Look, I panicked, okay?!” he retorted. Her stomach lurched. Although he was still pacing, he tried to slow and breathe, regaining his composure and ability to think. “I’ll go back to him and try to save the situation as much as it can be saved by now. Meantime—al, I need you to put the time machine back to the way it was this morning as fast as you can, and reboot it. And dawn…”

When he met her eyes, his walking finally came to a stop. The human patiently waited for him to give her his mind without pressuring him, although she couldn’t
without pressuring him, although she couldn’t look down in shame, thinking that he had to be been because she was literally useless in this kind of that, probably, involving her in anything would only make things worse.

Sans looked conflicted and terrified, at best. She him shaking and the sound of bones rattling set down her spine, even from a distance.

Eventually, he tore his pupils away from her and his sockets to an extent she had never seen before. Finally completed his sentence:

“... get ready to reset.”

Dawn’s eyes widened like saucers. “Wait, **WH**

Her immediate outburst completely overpower, sound of Alphys’s toolbox crashing to the ground.

“S-Sans,” she quickly added in a shy voice, “I’m **against** it, but—if are you sure...?”

He sighed heavily, avoiding her look. “I don’t want you to do it, but if we can’t find to make sure he won’t tell on us, I think we have any other choice than to erase that from the timeline. I dunno, next time you’ll just back to the basement and I’ll invite him for...”
“I— I got that part.” she cut him short, shaking her head with her eyes closed and flailing her arms around nervously. “I’m just— I’ve never Reset before. I don’t even know how that’s supposed to work, what I have to do, and— What if I mess up and go too far back in time or something? I don’t want to erase everything! And what about Alphys...?”

At the mention of her name, they both went as anxious as the lizard in question.

“**I-I... I’ll be fine.**” she assured, looking at him warily. “**Either way... I won’t even be able to tell the difference.**” she smiled weakly.

This seemed to comfort Sans in his idea. Nonetheless, the arguments Dawn had pointed out brought an evident noticeable tension to him, as if he had just realized the possibility that, indeed, she might have a lot less control over her ability than he had assumed. He should have expected this. This power was supposed to be literally against the most basic laws of nature. He couldn’t expect anyone to figure out something that was supposed to be impossible to achieve in such a short time and without any sort of training or catalyst.

“look, i... i don’t know how time jumping... either— in your head, i mean. i know what’s
on with the universe when that happens, but i know if that’ll help you figure it out and we really have time for a thermodynamics lesson now.” he mumbled uneasily. “just... look, if we go on the machine again, no matter how far back we go, i’ll be able to catch up. even if, yeah, if you go back to, uh, just about thirty minutes or a day ago, that’ll be great. or just go back to morning if it’s too hard to figure out, i don’t Panic seemed to have overcome him again, and he marked a pause to try to take a breath. This definitely not be good news.

“either way, i’d like the time machine to be before you do that. i don’t have any codewords...” “we messed up and had to go back in time because the machine was out during that time”, so i don’t it’d be a good idea for you to jump back if you remember it. so take your time to just... work the head around it for now, i guess?” He stayed a few more seconds, tilting his skull repeatedly could look at both of them one after the other with an anxious look. “anyway, i really should go now. can i count on you two for the backup pr... The girls shared a concerned look, but they quickly
back towards him and assured him that they understood and that they would follow it. Trust but not the least bit reassured, Sans soon vanished.

Alphys immediately went back to work. Dawn could only offer her help in order to get the machine back sooner, but the way too fresh memory of the accident quickly came back, as well as the fact that she had already said that she would stop helping in the basement in order to exactly stop this kind of accident from occurring.

Besides, Sans had given her a very important mission as well. She had no idea how to go through with it and hoped that it would not come down to this, but she had to prepare for this eventuality.

The ability to Reset was linked to the amount of determination someone, or something had (since Sans had mentioned his machine to be able to act that way); and in her case, her determination, just like any human’s, had probably gathered somewhere inside her SOUL. So... Maybe she had to try to find that determination and use it for something? Which implied that she had to make her SOUL more familiar with the fact that she now had a SOUL...

When Sans and Alphys had done this magic that made her SOUL visible, the first thing she had noticed was just how huge it felt. And Sans had confirmed it when he had said that it was the SOUL of someone who had gained a lot of knowledge and experience.
apparently much bigger than the regular human—were supposed to look like. Also, no matter who initiated the trick, that big heart stuck in her chest looked cyan both times—unless it was turned on.

She wondered if the SOUL traits could be considered a sort of spectrum, instead of distinct categories. Either way, according to the game’s lore, it seemed her trait was ‘Patience’... She had to admit, that was true to some extent. But still... even though it had never been explicitly said through the canon, the fandom used it as obvious that Patience was the most passive sort of like the opposite of determination.

She had never wanted this to be true and she had thought that the amalgam ‘Patient means waiting and doing nothing’ was way too simplistic, a insulting and kind of infuriating. She was waiting, she could stay still for relatively long periods of time with her thoughts, but it was only because she was judging when she was needed to stay on the side when she was needed to act. She was not being passive, she simply saw it as, well, observing, and thinking acting so she could make sure that when she did move, it’d be to do something worth being done. Most of the time, she knew what she wanted to her life, and there were few things that could
her life, and there were few things that could from doing what she wanted. 
So... Yeah. She had to brush aside that fanon.
She had determination, and she was going to use was what she wanted to do.

The more she thought about these things, and she reminisced how it had felt when Sans or Alp doing their trick to show her SOUL around, the could now feel that something was indeed there, chest, pounding at a slightly different rate than her heart. She would be lying if she said that this wasn’t weirding her out, but... She still felt some fascination towards this novelty.
That, and the fact that she had a mission. She had focused on the real goal, there.

Concentrating her attention on the feeling of beating inside her chest became strangely soothing a certain point.

She was deliberately trying not to focus on the Resets just yet in fear that just thinking about doing would accidentally trigger it too early, but in the midst of this strange meditation made her feel like she was more about herself than she had ever before.

Waiting for Sans to return, either with good news the order to Reset, she closed her eyes and relax
by the funny rhythm the desynchronization between heart and her SOUL created. She had always loved it, and she found this one especially inspiring.

Listening to the music of her life, she would wait...

She would be Patient.

“.......... A video game.” Grillby deadpanned.

“Is that all? I didn’t expect you to tell the truth, but I thought you’d at least tell a story a bit more credible than that.”

“Oh, you don’t believe me?” Flowey pretended to look offended, but it was obvious that it was mocking so. “It’s really easy to prove, you know.”

The monster merely shook his head in disbelief. Alternate universes, he could wrap his mind around, but often mentioned something about alternate realities when he was drunk. An alternate universe where the laws of physics were different and magic was not an afterthought, he could imagine it. Well, he had trouble coming up with what exactly it could look like and how the people living in that sort of world could deal with their existence without having the possibility to use magic, but...

But then. Sans remembering time loops? The latest being an actual time loop, he grew more confused ever since.
being controlled by another human from one of the worlds who was playing a video game? This was not

“This doesn’t make sense.” he huffed

“Video games run on numbers and scripts if I’m not mistaken. I may not be a scientist, but as far as I’m concerned reality doesn’t work that way.” He

around them in the small cave, giving lazy glances to the mushrooms and other members of the local ecosystem: “Does all of this look like a video game to you? Strangely, I seem to see that many pixels.”

“Well, sure, when you see it like that, I guess you won’t get to see it that easily.” the flower rodent rolled her eyes, mocking annoyance and disinterest. “But then again I know how to look at it properly...”

The being locked its eyes on him, gazing with intense intensity. Grillby felt watched in a way that he was not used to. He had never experienced before.

Suddenly the flower’s smirk expanded horrendously. Grillby was not given the chance to say or do anything. He was asked to question this behavior, because immediately someone appeared out of nowhere, without making any sound.

* Grillby 28 ATK 17 DEF*
* Clearly needs a reality check.

“... You can get some very precious information about the people around you, thanks to it continued, grinning like a demon but so carefree and delighted as ever. “You get to learn of things about your surroundings and neighbors. What they’re like. What they do in their lives. Their strengths... Their weaknesses.” There was a humorous huff when it read the flavor text. “Heh, Maybe you do need someone to help you set things straight. I guess little old me will have to do.”

“T-this is... What is this?” Grillby nervously and cautiously walked closer to the hovering immobile black rectangle. He tried to observe it under a few different angles, but quickly dismissed the idea when a wave washed over him as he fully regained his composure.

“..... You’re the one making this, This is just a bullet shaped like a pixelated box.”

“Well duh, of course I’m doing this.” It rolled its eyes again, as if all he had said was nothing but ridiculous absurdities. Again. “The game’s the one making the numbers for most monsters here, though...”
The fire elemental carefully took a few steps back, the flower made its way closer to the pixelated dialogue box, not the least bit fazed by a veiled voice that definitely did not belong in this world.

Then again, if it were the one who created it in place as he was guessing, it was only normal to be surprised by your own abilities; but on the other hand, the more he stared at this otherworldly shape, eerily still and frozen in space and time, the more he was convinced that if, indeed, the flower was the one The raw power and control it had over its magic can attained extremely worrying levels he had never seen in his life, let alone dared imagine.

The pure perfection in the shape of this rectangle, letters, the perfection of its stillness, the perfect colors and how perfectly clear the separation between black and white parts were... Even if the feeling in made it clear that it was composed of nothing but basic magic, and was supposed to act just like a bullet of the most regular kind, Grillby had never seen kind of flawless mastery before.

Even the bullets of the most talented monsters had sort of flaw in their symmetry, or would move in irregular patterns due to the influence of param...
monster had no control upon, such as potential local gradients in temperature or magic concentrations. This perfection arriving from outside of time and space. This was not only *unnatural*. This was literally the laws of physics he knew and had never learned.

“I don’t think any player got to see your stats before what with you never going out to fight.” A thin flexible vine rose out of the ground and would gently touch the numbers on the flying black screen as the flower watched it with amusement. “That’s not too bad, I guess. Maybe they’d be higher if you got to some more serious training from time to time.”

The vine lightly poked the bottom right corner of the screen and immediately the text disappeared and the screen rapidly shrank until the window it represented became small to keep track of.

That was definitely not how magic bullets were supposed to disintegrate when their summoner dismissed them.

Grillby was still far from convinced, but even if he couldn’t count the small doubts that started to form in his mind, the mere thought was enough. Even if this “video game” talk were nothing but a fabrication coming from the mouth of a being obviously lying through its teeth, denying the veracity of this preposterous tale would only leave him with...
this preposterous tale would only leave him with the realization that this tiny talking flower, who would hypothetically have enough power to pull this off without any effort, would have made everything up just to mess with his mind and drive him insane. Which, admittedly, was actually starting to work.

The flower went back to staring at him with its cheery grin and those soul-devouring eyes.

“`I’m not gonna lie: under the game’s perspective, you’re pretty boring. I don’t know what the players find in you, you hardly ever say any lines! You’re just some random background NPC. You never even come out of your pub.”` It had said all this with a deep, almost disappointed tone... Yet, immediately bobbed its face up and down in extreme delight.

“`That’s why this is so exciting! It’s the first time I’ve had something new about you in FOR. Sure, there’s probably not much going on in your life since you do exactly the same thing every day without counting the Resets, but still! Now I’m out of the loop! There’s GOT to be something interesting we can do with this, don’t you think?`... Define “interesting.”`, Grillby did not say out loud. He should definitely not encourage...
told him that he did not want to find out what the definition of the term was."

Sadly, he quickly found out that he did not really have a choice in the matter. The being came to face him eagerly, and he quickly recognized to be a battle stance, and it was an encouraging and enthusiastic look. Definitely not about to battle *that thing* but definitely not willing to die because he would not even try to defend himself. The monster found no other choice but to at least stand on his feet and brace himself for whatever was going to happen.

The one thing he had not planned for, was for the world to turn to black and disappear.

He looked around in panic, but there really was more around them other than himself and the Thing. Not for long: as soon as the flower asked him rhetorically if he was ready (he was obviously not, but it was not for his opinion), multiple other dial-shaped bullets appeared between them, this time of a variety of colors, sizes and contents in the numbers they displayed. Grillby recognized some of them were probably meant to look like button options, but some voice in the back of his mind snarled that he should have taken some time to play some video games with his young son more often, because if he had, at least maybe he wouldn’t feel that lost and disoriented.
least maybe he wouldn’t feel that lost and disoriented amongst the options laid before him.

“This is what the fights look like in the game, technically they’re called ‘Encounters’ instead of ‘battles’, you get my point.” the thing explained excitedly. Then it showed a wide grin. “So! Convinced yet?”

If this meant that it would leave him alone, Grillby wasn’t going to say ‘yes’ just to please it and hope that it would free him from whatever this void place was. When it saw his slow nod, though, it appeared to have wished for a more expressive response. Too bad Grillby was not going to freak out openly on that screen, he could not afford to show any sort of weakness right now.

“Aw, come on! This is going to be fun!” it called impatiently, with the exact same tone as the voice of an innocent child asking a grown-up to play with them. “Try to do something!”

The last thing he wanted to do was to play along with an unnatural setting, but once more, he quickly reasoned following that ungodly brat’s wishes would be the only way he would maximize his chances of survival. Grillby sat down at the buttons laid before him, not so willing to play this sociopath’s game, but at least confused and curious enough to look for answers.

While the ‘FIGHT’ option appeared somewhat
given the circumstances, he wanted to stay prudent. It was foolish to attack something when you didn’t even know just how powerful it could be, and if that damned flower was indeed the one creating all of this, then charging into an actual magic fight was beyond suicidal.

He gave a quick look at his other options, and thought the button ‘ACT’ was probably the more appealing. ‘Acting’ would surely give him a wider range of options. He could indeed pull off, assuming the name was to be trusted. However... When he tried to lift an arm and press the button, nothing happened.

He struggled. Couldn’t move his body. He tried to speak. He found himself unable to do even that. The flower’s demonic face was the most hideously horrifying image he had ever laid eyes upon.

“You can’t,” it smirked in sadistic victory. “But this isn’t your turn.”

The fire elemental kept trying to fight against this ruthless force that maintained him paralyzed, but it was hopeless. Just what kind of sorcery was this...? This thing was doing this, it had to. But if he had to choose between phenomena being caused by a video game of some sort or being the effects of some sick creature’s evil
He could not fathom the extent of the power hold—let alone when its intentions were so malevolent. Grillby found himself believing that he almost had the option that his reality was a video game. This He was not sure whether he should find it reassuring or appealing, given the current circumstances.

“So! It’s my turn!” it exclaimed excitedly, stating cruel obvious state of reality. “Hey, you wanna know what’s going to happen if I press that ‘FIGHT’ button?”

He could not move. Aiming just about any sort of attack against him would be so easy. Had this been why monsters had died to the hands of a human child, the best soldiers of the entire kingdom? Had they died because they literally couldn’t dodge or defend themselves against any of the attacks launched at them...? Was a human child was roaming through the Underground alive, was this what they used to kill their victims? Were they not supposed to be able to use magic—no way. So if the human was not doing this... What else?

Struggling but unable to move even a single finger, the flower’s vine came closer to that FIGHT button. He could do nothing but listen to that psychopathic revelation finally hit him once and for all. After all, could he explain everything that had happened so far? The flower should have pointed to the...
The flower had been right all along. This was a video game. He was in a video game, nothing but a meaningless NPC spending the entire existence in his pitiful pub, and he was going to die.

Just as the vine was approaching dangerously this button and about to press it, it stopped. The vine extended its stem so its face could make its way through the dialogue boxes and come to smile at him from up close.

“Hee hee hee, you should see your face. Come on, I was just kidding! Killing you isn’t fun. Not when you can do so many things OTHER than being killed. Being dead is boring, right?”

Before he could process what was happening, the vine retracted back to its former place, and the vine retracted back to its form. He did not bother to press two other buttons he did not bother to notice.

Soon, the flavor text shown on his side of the ‘battle’ changed to display a new sentence:

* Flowey is sparing you.

Grillby realized he could move again. Instead of pressing any buttons, he used this newfound mobility to
step back until he bumped into the wall behind him.

The flower’s smirk of deep satisfaction was widened

Thank the Angel, when he did collide with that

realized that the black void had faded to leave

exactly in the same place they were standing in by

whole thing had occurred. The buttons and boxes

there, but they quickly vanished as well.

He was shaking way too much for him to not
come the ground and sit in a rush. The intensity of his

could have disguised his tremors as just their

but this hurried gesture could not be brushed off

“So! What did you think of your first REAL fight?

God, would that thing ever give him a break? “

You don’t have any thoughts to share with me?

If his words were scarce, his glare was hopefully

enough. Couldn’t this thing just leave him alone

proving its point enough as it was...?

“Ooh, I see what it is. It’s that whole “I’m just a
game character and I might not even be real at

should life even matter” train of thought, isn’t

It rolled its eyes as if this “train of thought” were

stupidest topic it had ever heard of. But what

Shouldn’t this “Flowey” entity be just as much a “
of that game as he was...?

But if it indeed were, then how could it have known all this? How could it do what it had just done? Instead Grillby assumed that if no monster in the Underworld had been aware of this mechanism before, then meant that it had to be an ability specific to some particular entities...

And if this world were indeed confined inside a video game, then the entities in question would be, namely, those in control of this world and its destiny. Did that mean ‘Flowey’ was a player itself...?

He knew far too little to find any decisive conclusion. He was far too tired and done to care. He just wanted to be over. He just wanted to be left alone, and...

... And what, exactly? Even if he could get out of this world, what would he do with this knowledge? Could he go back to his life and greet his neighbors so one day when he now knew the truth about their own existence?

Almost as if it could still prove that it could feel something after what had happened, Flowey came over to him and whispered in what sounded like a caring tone.

“Hey, don’t worry about all this. There’s going to be a Reset, sooner or later. You won’t remember. You’ll get to go back to live your boring life with a new start.”
having to question any of this anymore.”
Did it have any idea that saying this was not helpful? Judging how it immediately dropped the reassurance and came back to its cheery grin, definitely so.

“Unless you want me to come back to you and give you a little reminder in the next timeline? Just stay and observe it; it stayed in place, still and patient, for a time that was too long for what this thing seemed to be used to. He merely turned his head resolutely so he wouldn’t say anything but where it was standing. He wasn’t looking so he could not notice, but at some point, the flower froze in place, as if it had just realized something.

“Oh... Looks like it’s almost time for me to make a graceful exit, to leave.” it said dejectedly. “Well, now or never, I asked you a question, didn’t you hear?”

Once more, he was only greeted with silence and He was not going to give it that credit. Sighing, Flowey shook its face in overdramatic dissatisfaction.

“... Well, I’ll take that as a ‘no’ then. I’ll just have to know, that’s disappointing. I had a lot of fun. First time in a looooong while.”

Just be gone already. What could even make that the need to leave in the first place, anyway? No, this wasn’t the right question to ask...
... No, this wasn't the right question to ask. The real question was, did he still have the
courage to muster the intent to care about the answer?

Coincidentally or not, about a minute later, a skeleton appeared out of thin air and landed
behind the waterfall. Look who finally decided to show up.

The little guy looked at him with concern, not daring to make any step closer without his
personality.

In response, Grillby remained mute and still. Did he know about this “video game” situation? According
to ‘Flowey’ had said, his plan not only proved that he had acknowledged its existence, but also that he was
actively working on “freeing” them from that game’s influence. Just

Was that what Sans had had to deal with for so long?

No wonder he drank so much when he thought he wouldn’t notice, and no wonder he became so
depressed whenever his mental filters were inhibited.

“... hey.” Sans greeted shyly when he could not

stand the silence anymore. He raised his left hand

and showed a heavy looking plastic bag. “I brought
grimy grub. It’s not as good as your food, but...

dawn tried her best. The sandwiches taste ok.

The bartender sighed, then looked away.

If he already knew what kind of existence they
If he already knew what kind of existence they had, that their entire universe was bent to the will of things... What was even the point? He had stopped caring, probably somewhat reason,

Well no, it was far from reasonable; but if he was stuck in time loops and live every iteration

unbearable knowledge, how else could he keep

and stop hurting his own feelings...?

Carefully, the young skeleton went to sit down ne

against the same wall. The fire elemental came

that since he had not witnessed his discussion with

maybe he did not know that now he knew, and...

What if he were doing this solely for his sake?

That would be sweet and a nice thanking gesture for

gifts he had given him earlier, but...

“*You only came to keep me company little while and then let me fade here, didn’t you...?*”

“wha— no, of course not!” Sans looked genuinely hurt and horrified to hear that his friend could have such idea in mind. “*grillbs, no matter what happens, i’ll get you outta here.*

“Why? Aren’t you worried that I’ll the others as soon as I get out...
just wasting your time, here. Aren’t you?

He gave him a worried pair of glowing pupils; soon he could not afford to raise them toward the sky. “Well... yeah, the safety of the plan’s coming into question but still, the worst that could happen is that we don’t want to believe us...” He scratched the back of his spine awkwardly. Bad sign. “Well, I’ve told you before, human to jump back in time so you’d forget about this. would be easy from that point to make sure that accident won’t happen again.” Finally, he managed to raise his skull again and let a small expression of despaired hope shine in his eyes. “But... I’d really prefer if we didn’t have to do that...”

Well... Now that he already knew what he was about, it probably was going to make things a lot easier. While he still had to wrap his mind around the fact that exactly Sans would have needed to bring an ordinary human from another dimension for his plan, he couldn’t deny that he fully trusted him regarding his intentions. After all, Sans offered him one of the sandwiches. He took it.

It took him a few moments to realize that Sans was not

“... I look, I’m sorry I panicked. for a moment...”

The short skeleton buried his skull between his hands and knees, moaning in guilt. “I didn’t...”
hands and knees, moaning in gente. I didn’t fight you, and if we’d fought then the could’ve found out, and... i’m really sorry i bit you here. i didn’t think.” He slowly raised his back, sending a shy and concerned look at “h-how are you holding up, by the way...? do want me to take us elsewhere for this? i could a more comfy place to talk. warmer one, too.

Grillby turned his head away from him, tightening the grip on his crossed, nervous arms. “...It’s Doesn’t matter.”

In the end, it wasn’t that much different from What was ice anyway, if not water about to me had to look out for puddles, and... that giant scream of death facing them.

Would the waterfall really harm him if it were outside of a ‘FIGHT’? He wondered if all these time monsters would accidentally hurt themselves about any reason, some sort of invisible ‘FIGHT’ triggered somehow and they received damage. Did they have ‘Hit Points’? All video games had that. How many did he have left...?

Sans took a long breath. Apparently, he was not explain anything. And now that he knew what
about to tell, he could not blame him for being ne-
fearing being taken for even more of a madman,
already had appeared to sound earlier.

“so... i’ll be honest, i’m not really sure where
begin. there’s really a lot to it.”

“..... Maybe starting from the begin
would be best.” Grillby tried to encourage

“heh. true.” he chuckled. “so... what exactly
know? guess i’ll just try to take it from the

So he was letting him choose the conversation sta-

Grillby hesitated, but as he thought back of what
happened before he arrived... He honestly could
less about answers. He had had more than enough
Part of him argued that maybe keeping Sans up
with this encounter would be preferable, but...
just didn’t want to talk about it. Chances were, if
remember the time loops and knew about the
existence already, he wouldn’t be teaching him
new. He probably had met that thing himself in the
So instead of talking about the unpleasant prese-

“I know that you and your brother-
in from Hotland about three years.
We first met when you came at the
same time after that...” he said, remi
some time after that..." he said, reminiscing about the events with a fondness he had never truly felt before. "I remember the opportunity to discover, let alone comment on the fact that you had to leave at all. I remember you saying that that was your foster family’s idea and you didn’t have a say in it because your brother made the final decision."

"yeah, totally got me." Sans laughed. "crazy how people can change. I would’ve never guessed you’d ever feel at home in this ol’ town, yet here we are..."

"I remember the day you two arrived. Your brother was doing his best to be the sweetest neighbor we could have had... You showed up later, wearing that t-shirt and sunglasses. You even had that same shade with the palm trees on it."

Grillby chuckled warmly as he recollected the image of the scene and how the first image the townsfolk had of him and Sans had been that of Papyrus discovering his brother’s new grooves. He had been shocked, only to scold him for almost half an hour in the middle of the streets about how he had asked him to try to look friendly and ‘blend in’ so they wouldn’t disturb the inhabitants from their daily lives and disturb the local quietness because that was exactly what Grillby had moved in for. If that wasn’t a perfect first impression..."
“Talk about provocation. It was ob
how much you didn’t want to be here.
Sans was laughing along, the same tone of no
in his voice. “heh heh eh... good times. i kept
stares for a week and whenever they men
the event i’d pull out the sunglasses
punchline. everybody was always askin whe
glasses were comin from. nobody ever figured
i was literally just teleportin them.”

So that was how he did it. Magic trick up his sleev
More like magic superpower unjustly accorded to
conman with the tendency to make terrible jokes.
Then again, in retrospect, a lot of his pranks were
hilarious now that he knew how he had been doi
Part of him was now genuinely impressed and so
infuriated that nobody had ever found out that
use some kind of teleportation, himself included.
he knew, some occurrences were just so obvious
he not found out earlier? Was denial really that
influence so it could bend perception to such ext

As he reminisced his own memories, Sans eve
sighed. “i guess y’could say that’s the only
thing that came out of the accident... kinda.
wasn’t worth the effort though.” Seeing G
confused look, he immediately added: “don’t get it wrong, that’s a super cool power and i got used to having it probably a bit too much by now, i totally have trouble adjustin to things if i suspect it but if it meant that could set things be normal... i’d do it without any second thought.”

“You had an accident...?” the fire elemental asked in surprise in-between two bites. The sandwich didn’t taste as bad as it looked, after all.

“yep. very bad one, at that.”

“We were there ever any good ones?” Sans snorted. “true, unless you count Tha With the Glasses.”

“...... You’re still forbidden from looking at my cellar.” he glared coldly.

“come on, you and i both know that i was the one who saved it. i was innocent, this time! without you would’ve all been doomed, by wine or by fire.” Honestly, Grillby neither needed nor wanted a reminder.

“Could you remind me why I haven’t banned you yet?”

“'cause startin from the day i showed up you were havin’ fun with the way the ready goin’ wasin’ off...”
started getting thrice as much attention?"

He... legitimately did not have any counter argument to this. Sans did attract customers like a magnet, for some unexplainable reason. “… Seems you are right…”

In response to the bartender’s mockingly defeat, the skeleton chuckled lightly. Grillby realized just how long it had been since he last saw him laugh with an unhinged sincerity...

But this was not one of those times. Despite everything, a weight remained.

“…… Getting back to this accident you mentioned. Is this where you got your health issue? I heard you sparring until you got... “sick.” You said it wasn’t worth it, is what you meant? And what exactly did you mean by “normal”…?”

A part of him that he now wanted to silence wondered how this ‘health issue’ would transcribe according to video game rules. If he assumed that the system, indeed in use, would this mean that something was wrong with his HP…? That would explain why it would be too dangerous for him.

Some other part of him also started making connections between different elements he had
connections between different elements he had. If Sans knew about this video game problem and some sort of “accident”... Could it be that the two somehow related?

Looking at the skeleton’s reaction, something was blatantly hurting him; but he realized that he was...

“...well, that too, I guess.” he murmured to himself, shrugging and seemingly deliberately avoiding the last question. “But what I really had in mind is... we lost someone really important on that day...”

In a matter of seconds, everything suddenly clicked. Pieces of the puzzle Grillby had collected through the years were now connected... or, well, almost. But now he knew enough that he could very easily guess where this conversation was going.

“...When you were drunk, it was common... you'd mention your father, and you once... that the move was related to the fact that they wanted you to move from his death...?”

He had never taken it seriously, and even now, he was ready to hear just about anything and trust without checking... Something just wasn’t making sense.

“But the odd thing is... Everyone... the man died more than twenty years...
the man died more than thirty years ago. It’s... strange that you would remember him at all. Wouldn’t you have been a toddler at that time?”

Sans refrained a sarcastic huff. “… yeah, odd…”

Grillby was not sure whether the waterfall’s current had received some sort of strong and sudden gust of wind. He felt like this sharp and desperately cold air had dropped a bucket full of freezing water on his head. It burned, it hurt, and it felt hopelessly cold and lonely.

Sans took a stiff breath, avoiding his look.

“Grillby, i’ve... look, i’ve never been able to talk about this before. Only Alphys knows she was there at the time. I’m not even sure anyone else knows. But, long story short… the accident wasn’t from twenty years ago. It actually happened three years ago.” There was a tense silence.

The strained expression in his sockets and still clenching teeth, it almost looked as if the smile was repressing a sob. “When I arrived, everyone thought it was normal that he’d died so long ago. It’s like if everything he’d done in the past had just—never happened. Nobody understood why I missed him now and not earlier, but... it’s like that he was still there at that time... ehe...”
That he was still there at that time, okay? When he felt a flaming, yet comforting and sympathetic hand on his left shoulder, he understood in the middle of his rambling, he had started. When he raised his skull and tilted it to his side, he was baiter’s confused, but compassionate look.

“... You don’t have to continue if it’s too hard.” he muttered cautiously. “I was talking about it would help you better about this issue, but... It use if you feel like you have to.”

“i... well, i said it before. keepin secrets sucks. it’s... even now, i just literally CAN’T tell, can’t talk about it. i mean now you look like you’d believe me but it’s... hard. i guess part of me still thinks it can’t be real. this is too good to be true.”

An incredulous laugh stiffly came out.

“look, i’l just drop the fact that al tried to get me to see a therapist for me, but that didn’t really work. the lady wouldn’t get a thing. all i got out of it was a stupid pet rock to take care of. so i kinda got used to dealin with the fact that even if it’s to be honest, nobody’d ever get it...?”
He looked away, his pupils dimming dangerously.

"even al. she's known the whole thing for years, now, but... she doesn't remember my dad at all... I can't understand how it feels."

This all but confirmed what Grillby had to do. Of course, he knew what he should avoid doing, at least at the moment.

The poor guy was obviously not ready; whatever he was thinking about, whatever it was that he had been through, he was hurting even through the mere reminiscence of events. He had never seen him so... vulnerable.

Thankfully, he did not currently feel the curiosity to obtain answers. The conclusion was obvious, and he did not hesitate further before sharing his decision with young monster. Said decision was met with great

"you're gonna believe me? just like that? you even gonna ask about the human, or...?" Sam sincerely dumbfounded by his choice. Maybe, he could lie underneath: "... you're not gonna go mob as soon as i get you outta here, are you?

Grillby vigorously shook his head, sending soothing sound around and calmly confirming that he had intention, at least not anymore.
"........ Look, Sans." he sighed, looking down. Yet it felt like there was some small joking tone in his words and attitude, as if he could almost see him smile. "After what I’ve seen, I’d believe just about anything you’d say without questioning it. You’d tell me you’re secretly a human mage in hiding and I’d still believe you and leave you alone.

Sans snorted. "psh. where did you even get that idea? the shortcut thing?"

The bartender shrugged playfully. "Maybe. I even feel you using your magic. You’re doing it. That definitely says raise some red flags."

That made the young skeleton laugh all the more as he retorted that this only confirmed that it was clear that the elder would tell on him as soon as they got out. His chuckles were amazingly contagious.

When the laughs calmed down, a serene silence let them breathe in peace for a few minutes.

"Still... Can I at least say something about all this?" The skeleton sent a confused pair of pupils, but his skull soon relaxed tentatively. "I hope I understood at the most important part. But if un
the most important part. But if you allow me... Maybe you should look your relatives more. Especially at like these.”

Sans stiffened. “don’t— i care about my family. I retorted uneasily. “i really do, i just...”

“I’m not saying that you don’t. I’m saying that because you have lost of them... You seem to forget the one who are still here.” he explained.

“I’m not so much saying this for us rather for your own sake. I know not family and that we won’t ever able to replace the ones you lost when you moved in town... You made family here, in a way. Didn’t you?”

The young monster relaxed a bit and smiled warmly and sincerely at the comforting thought. He still looked, however, wanted to fight against the idea and find arguments of his own, but it was probably more for the sake of arguing than because he was completely disagreeing.

“It’s amazing that you’re actually trying to save... almost everyone. But it’s not only focus on saving them and the meantime you stay so reclusively alone... You’re doing a lot more harm...
yourself than you realize, I’m sure. He added. “With such high stakes... You have to hold on to your sanity one way or another. Staying close to the ones you can support you even a little is the best solution I could think of.”

Damn, he really knew how to make his soul melt with his warm-heartedness, didn’t he. That guy really was the best bartender in the whole world. Not only was his bartending skills absolute best, he was also the best listener, and everyone in turn came to talk... He surely had the best words in the world, damn did he care a lot about his regulars. All of his regulars.

“I’ll be frank.” Grillby added after a moment of silence, looking at the now empty bag Sans brought. “When you mentioned having lunch, I thought this isn’t what I had in mind.”

There was a blunt snort. “Yeah, me neither.”

“I mean, it’s... I feel like we both needed this.” he admitted calmly. “Although I have done without this whole real escaping breaking mess.”

“Tell me ‘bout it.” Sans took a chunk out of the ketchup bottle. He quickly paused, then raised his glass with a hesitant look: “speaking of which, with that, this thing about keeping a human around...”
thing about keepin a human around..."

Grillby took a heavy breath. "... It’s all
From what I’ve seen so far... I the less we think about it, the bet

Honestly, Sans felt the same. He confirmed that absent-mindedly but with relief, and soon looked for something to change the subject. Fortunately, he quickly found one, as he magically produced a white rectangular device from seemingly nowhere.

"hey, wanna see something cool?"

"............ What are you doing?"

Sans grinned trollesquely. "just wait 'till you see human's face. gonna be a blast."

When both monsters appeared in the living room, they were alone. Sans quickly deduced that the girls had probably left to be in the basement, and after all, they probably didn’t have anything else to do in the meantime. When he was going to ask about the possibility to accompany the short skeleton dance Grillby hesitated, but soon decided to follow his friend.

The reunion was obviously held with shock and surprise, but after Sans simply explained how the situation evolved with just one sentence ("relax, he’s con"
the tension quickly loosened. The awkwardness,

“eh, it’s ok. the human doesn’t bite.” he chucked
while nudging the tall fire elemental at his side,
seeing that he was still standing stiff and as close
to the door as possible.

Dawn rolled her eyes jokingly, but did not seem
offended by her implied comparison with a wild
Surely this was a common prejudice among
elves anyway, especially so after what they had been through.
She felt uncomfortable at the idea that she might
go through some more discriminatory situations in the coming years, but at least she could understand where they were coming from. At least, she reasoned that if there was a thing similar to how it went in some far-off places, discrimination against humans was a lot more common than the other way around.

“So... H-hey?”

She tried saluting Grillby again, just as shyly as she could, hoping that it would not give the same impression again. Thankfully, this time, the monster returned her salutes with a similar one and an almost inaudible “. . . .”

The awkwardness remained for a few more minutes, as various introductions were made and civilities were exchanged, but a few jokes here and there eventually eased everyone into a warmer att
yet quickly eased everyone into a warmer attitude, and soon the four could discuss freely.

“Also, Sans, am I gonna get my phone back?”

The fire elemental immediately sent him a dirty look and said, “I was totally responsible for the disappearance of your phone, and he knew it. Sans merely shrugged and gave it back to her, not giving it much thought, but as soon as she turned away, his expression fell to a mixture between bafflement and preoccupation.

“oh yeah, forgot to tell ya sooner, but my counterclockwise spiral isn’t the most imaginative you could’ve come up with, y’know.” he chided.

“anyway, i hope you like the new wallpaper. It’s a lot better than that dumb selfie anyway.”

“… Moving on.” the human teenager grunted, turning her device’s screen off and burying it in the back pockets. “Are you guys gonna talk about that ‘TKI’ thing?” she immediately asked with a smug smile and playful eyebrows. “I’ve been wondering how anyone could ever put ‘Timeline’ and ‘Ketchup’ in the same sentence.”

Intense surprise washed over both men, but when they exchanged a quick look and reminisced the event, they remembered that they had indeed mentioned it...
point in their argument when she was still around.

“It’s better if you did not know.” deadpanned with what almost looked like an expression of fear and disgust.

“Just drop it, grillbys and i agreed to never talk about it again, and trust me when i say that there’s a very good reason for that.” Sans nodded so

“Ha. You know what? If you get to steal my glasses every five minutes and try to guess my past as i speak then I get to ask you about it whenever I want. I try to guess what that whole thing was about.”

Another look was exchanged. Sans snorted, then started laughing deeply and somberly with a menace.

“Fair enough.” he shrugged jokingly. “you’re never gonna find out, though.”

“I wouldn’t want to deter you, but i’m fairly certain that your imagination isn’t enough to even begin to figure out what happened on that day.” Grillby stared at the distraught, troubled, but

now that I know what you’re capable with those new tricks of yours, finally understand HOW you did it behind the distant, guarded, shadowed eyes.
He looked to the distance and shuddered somewhat.

“It only makes it even worse.”

Yeah, if anything, that only made her even more determined to find out, because dang did that have been something huge.

This was why, for the next few dozen minutes, she spent the rest of lunch in the living room, listening to the human’s first guesses while eating the rest of the sandwiches she had prepared. None of her hypotheses were even near what had really transpired, if he and Grillby were to be trusted, but at least they still had listened to all the nonsensical ideas she came up with.

Once lunch was over with, Grillby excused himself and offered to come back if he could be of some assistance. Sans quickly seized the opportunity.

“Hey dawn, can I talk to you for a minute?” His uneasy tone had an immediate effect on the woman he had directed this question to. She silently rose and turned fully towards him, wordlessly asking him to continue: “I was thinking. Do you... have any friends or family back in your world?” He scratched the back of his skull awkwardly. “I mean, ‘if’ you do, but... you must miss ’em, don’t you?”

“... Yeah?” She looked down, biting her lip gently.
She appeared to feel conflicted and homesick; she was trying to hide it. “I... I know I’ll get them again when we’re done. I mean, you’re gonna go back on that part of the plan, will you?”

“nah, bud, ’f course not. i promised, remember.”

She cracked an almost sad and guilty, yet somewhat and warmhearted smile as she gently released a breath she had not realized she had been holding.

“Yeah. You did. I’m saying it again, but, it means a lot that you did, of all people.” she softly. “So... I guess I do miss them, but... I’ve been trying not to think about it too often. That just makes it... harder? For no reason, at that. I’ll get to see them again, eventually, so, I just have to wait and everything I can to help in the meantime, right?”

The expression on Sans’s skull fell to the extent that he could no longer see the ever stuck smile now obviously showed that it was genuine to the least.

Grillby’s words about ‘putting your feelings relatives behind your duties’ resonated in his mind. He looked away. Well, he hadn’t said it that way, but the idea that he had tried to convey.

Sans realized that maybe this attitude was one he had been more with the task of duty... What he has...
I’m going to make a wild guess and assume you didn’t plan to tell anyone about this.”

Yep, Grillby was pissed. It was high time Sans said something to salvage the situation with his
usual great eloquence.

“not… really, no.”

Aw, come on. I know you can do better than that.

If anyone had ever doubted Sans’s ability to breathe, now was the moment when the most obvious confirmation was made that yes, magic skeleton monsters could, and most probably needed, to breathe. Especially when the afore-mentioned skeleton was stuck in a sticky situation in which one of his oblivious acquaintances was about to either have his mind blown in the worst way possible, or cause the imminent death of another of his acquaintances either by his own hand, or by the hand of another monster as soon as he would set an angry mob after them.

The choice was supposed to be easy. Blowing Grillby’s mind would not even have lasting consequences, since the time jump “Reset” he had planned on causing at the end should erase the impending existential crisis and potential loss of sanity— not to mention that, right now, the fire elemental’s sanity seemed to be already hanging by a thread and ready to be lost either way.

But, still. This choice meant that they would have to deal with said existential crisis for as long as they would need before they could fix everything, and although Grillby was quite the chill guy, this was bound to be a major hindrance.

Not to mention the fact that before dealing with the existential crisis per se, they would have to find a way to bring up the topic in the first place, and bring about favorable conditions for him to listen to their explanations, instead of doing what he was certainly thinking to be the most reasonable choice in such situation, that was to say, take care of the obvious public danger in the room, whether pacifistically or… possibly less so.

Okay. Start small.

“uuh… yeah, haha. heh.” Sans mimed some stage coughing. “um, grillbs, this is dawn. dawn, grillby.”

The human looked surprised by his course of action, but gladly followed his lead as she smiled and made a shy “Hi...” and an encouraging small wave with her free hand.

Grillby did not move an inch, although his fire crackled a bit. Defensively, or as an intimidation trick, she wasn’t sure.

“..... Sans. I have known you for almost three years. I really want to believe you’re not completely out of your mind.” The former barman sighed deeply, bringing a flaming hand to the alleged
location of his forehead and rubbing it tiredly. “But the more I think about how much I really know about you, the more I realize. I don’t know you at all.”

“I-look, uh… long story short, stuff happened. lots of stuff.” Sans did his best to keep a confident eye contact, but he was failing nonetheless. “maybe you could, uh… you wanna come inside? we can take a seat, have a nice chat, and explain all this… stuff?”

He remained perfectly still, emphasizing his intense skepticism. “You mean “stuff” like your tab that you promised countless times would somehow pay itself as soon as time would jump back, all the nonsense you say when you’re drunk about paradoxes in parallel universes, undetectable anomalies and mad scientists dying in their own past, or the Timeline Ketchup Incident?”

Sans grew pale. “please don’t bring up the tki, i swear it has nothin to do with it.” he said hurriedly. Then he paused, thinking thoroughly about what he had heard and shocked to realize that Grillby had caught up on that much throughout the years, even though he did not seem to take any of it seriously. “in fact it’s, uh, none of the above. it’s complicated. but, i swear we can explain if you just—”

“You can explain why you favored staying here and looking after a human instead of helping us survive all this time, even though the last human you assisted decimated most of the kingdom and half of my regular patrons and dear friends.” he interrupted bluntly, crossing his arms. He soon added for emphasis: “Our. Dear friends.”

… Yeah. A majority of the victims from Snowdin were part of the Royal Guard, and a huge part of the Royal Guard’s Snowdin division comprised the late members of the Canine Unit. Sans realized this was the first time in a while that he gave these guys even a single thought, and that the last time was long before the beginning of this timeline.

Maybe he really had stopped caring a lot more than he wanted to admit… yikes. He did like these guys, though…

Ugh. He really hoped that once all this mess would be over, he’d be able to care about everyone again, and for real.

But in the meantime… What was he supposed to say?

Behind him in the living room, Alphys was still in the doorway on top of the stairs, and could be barely considered to be in the room at all. She was frozen in place, obviously thinking hard about what she could do to try to help, but sadly she had never met this guy face to face before and had no idea how to deal with him, especially because most of her thoughts were focusing on trying to simply understand what had happened in the first place.

Dawn had remained as still as she could be at first, the only conclusions to her analysis of the
situation stating that *maybe* moving would be the worst possible thing to do at the moment.

Ugh, of *course*. Why are the patient ones always so boring? They never do anything!

*But,* then again… Sans seemed to be stuck in a mental infinite loop, Grillby was not amused, and Alphys was giving her panicked looks so *her* coming to the rescue was probably not going to happen anytime soon. The universe *needed* a catalyst so time could unfreeze, and preferably this catalyst had to be someone other than Grillby.

“L-look… H-h-hey.” she called out timidly, making another hand wave that she wished looked as friendly as she intended it. “I know this sounds nuts, e-especially with what’s been going on— I-i mean I probably don’t know the *details* of everything, but…”

Sans sent her the distressed “*what are you doing*” look, and this wordless yet passionate moral support quickly had the fantastic effect of making her realize, first of all, that she had no idea how to answer this question, and second, just how badly she screwed up.

Then again, maybe the skeleton’s mere act of turning his skull around to give her that look had been a mistake, too.

A burning dry breeze brushed her cheek and swept her hair out of the way of the surrounding howling wind, followed by a thundering crashing sound in the wall behind her. Seeing the large magic bullets that were now floating right behind the fire elemental’s back, Dawn understood that this was his way of politely asking her to mind her own business, and that at least he had been enough of a gentleman to give her a fair warning instead of, for example, immediately aiming for her. Either that or his aim was terrible, but given the distance between them she wanted to think that the first option was the more likely.

Either way, in response to this, she awkwardly pursed her lips, gestured to zip her mouth shut, and carefully took a step back. This seemed to appease the monster at least a bit because, although the bullets remained, they did seem to lose some consistence and somewhat shrink in size. Alphys judged this to be the moment to take action, and sneakily walked to the human’s side before ushering her back down in the basement and closing the door behind their path. During the procedure, the two other monsters merely stared at the girls’ antics, their heads slowly turning to follow them with their nonexistent eyes.

As soon as they vanished from view, Sans made it clear that he had not taken Grillby’s exploitation of his single second of distraction lightly.

“*what the hell,* man? you thought we’d attack you on sight or what?!”

“*Well,* not you.” he conceded calmly, though the palpable hesitation in his wording and invisible glare conveyed easily his implied doubts. Thankfully, after saying these words, his bullets
vanished completely.

“… heh. y’know, it’s funny, ‘cause I’m the one with the highest kill count in this house.” the skeleton said carefully and with noticeable regret, but also and most importantly, with a grave tone and menacing frown on his darkening sockets. “well technically i’ve just been killin the same kid over and over, so it’s debatable whether that counts as one kill or as however many times that makes by now. either way, that doesn’t change anything. it just looks like your instincts aren’t workin right today.”

This seemed to effectively freeze Grillby in place. Whether he took this not-so-subtle threat figuratively or literally, it appeared that, unfortunately, he did not interpret Sans’s attempt at a sarcastic joke the way the skeleton had originally meant it. Granted, Sans was now pissed as well, so his cryptic wording and ticked off temper did not help convey the initial meaning, which was: ‘appearances can be deceiving, so try to open your eyes and keep an open mind.’

Instead, although he had refused to believe it until these last words came out, the fire elemental gathered the most alarming message: Sans was actually a traitor to his kind, and/or considerably more likely to be mentally insane.

The former bartender was not sure which one of these two options was the worst; but no matter the conclusion, he knew that he could not handle this alone. He needed help.

Grillby’s left foot subtly glided a few inches backwards, as he carefully shifted his weight onto it. And then Sans saw him turn around and dash towards the rest of the town at high speed, too little too late.

During the fleeting half second he could afford to use to think, Sans tried to find a way to stop him that would be all at once pacifistic, efficient, and subtle. He had the time to remind himself that using magic would be neither pacifistic, nor subtle. However, considering the next step, he lacked too much time to properly avoid hasty decisions.

Grillby was forced to stop in his tracks when the short body of a way too familiar skeleton literally materialized right in front of him, out of nowhere and without any warning.

Well, ‘stopping in his tracks’ would not really be the most appropriate wording, since the poor monster did not have enough time before the collision to process that he had to stop in order to avoid colliding with the obstacle that just appeared less than three feet in front of him, and as a consequence, collision did occur, and soon both monsters landed in the snow, one on top of the other.

Well. At least, Sans thought, the attempt to stop him from running had been a… let’s say, half success.
Too shocked by the weirdness of the phenomenon he had just witnessed, Grillby forgot that he was in a position that would have easily allowed him to overpower his poor mentally disoriented friend, and instead he scuttled away from him, taken over by a senseless yet overwhelming fear.

“D… Did you just…?” He kept rambling tensely, his flames crackling as he turned his head repeatedly between Sans’s current location and the faraway, open doorframe of his house, assessing the distance. “How the hell did you… so quickly…?”

Sans slowly stood up and brushed himself off, sighing tiredly and slightly tilting his skull in slow horizontal movements. “trust me, that part’s not important.” When he was fully standing and raised his pupils back towards him, he met Grillby’s intensely disapproving glare. He face-palmed. “… well, ok, i can teleport. been able to do that for a while, too. that does sound like something important to mention. i get it. but that’s not the point.”

Grillby’s stance became tenser and warier. If his eyes were visible, Sans could have seen him squint them. “Is this really teleporting, or rather…?”

The skeleton sighed one more time, burying his hands in his hoodie’s pockets and letting his shoulders slump down in an attempt to look as harmless and friendly as he could.

“teleporting, grillbs. trust me, i would know if i had time powers, ‘cause that would’ve been a LOT more convenient for, like, literally everything that happened in my life.”

Despite his efforts, once more he had found himself unable to hide his sarcasm and irritation. Of course he would have expected such confusion and prejudice to come out of him; or out of any other monster in general, for that matter. This was the exact reason why he had kept his shortcuts a secret in the first place, after all.

When he saw that his answer didn’t seem to reassure his old friend to the slightest, he deadpanned.

“… this isn’t helpin make my case, is it.”

“No, it isn’t.” Grillby shook his head slowly, sounding almost apologetic in his tone. Almost.

Sans rubbed his skull exasperatingly. This wasn’t going anywhere. “grillby… please, give us a chance. i know this is crazy, but i SWEAR i can explain.”
He gave a quick glance at the rest of the town—most of the local inhabitants and his former neighbors were indeed back and working together to put everything back in place, but thankfully they did not seem to be paying them too much attention for the time being.

“You say that a lot,” the barman nodded calmly, “but you never did tell me anything.”

“well…” He sighed. Again. “yeah, fair. but, look, it’s the kind of stuff that i definitely wouldn’t expect you to believe right off the bat— we have proof to show you, but… i’d really prefer talkin about it indoors if you don’t mind.” He raised at him a pair of distressed, begging pupils. “please. al and the human will stay in the basement if you want. i promise we won’t do anythin, but it’s REALLY important that you keep the secret.”

“Sans, there is a human living in your house, and the Royal Scientist herself has kept this a secret along with you.” Judging from his tone and attitude, it was becoming more and more obvious that Grillby’s chill was actually starting to falter for good. “Knowing what her other secrets were like, I’m afraid it’s a lot more difficult for me to think that there is nothing dangerous with whatever it is you have been doing all this time. I wouldn’t be surprised if you knew about the Amalgamates, too. You didn’t look nearly as surprised as we did during the evacuation.”

A shiver ran down Sans’s spine when a dozen bullets materialized around him. Grillby did not wish to harm him, but they were effectively blocking the way to his house.

“Sans, this has gone on long enough. If this really isn’t a danger for us, then prove it. To everyone.”

“i can’t!” Sans blurted out in panic. He quickly regained his composure, or at least attempted to, but in any case he was becoming desperate. “look, trust me on this, i’d LOVE to do just that, ‘cause keeping secrets sucks. but i know for a fact that if some people learn about this, even if we’re LITERALLY working to save the world here, they still won’t listen. and even if that sounds crazy, the KEY part of the plan is that i NEED that human to stay safe if we wanna save everyone.”

The implications in his tone were numerous, and coupled with the growing bullets hovering around them and at the ready, it appeared that an actual fight was now becoming more and more unavoidable. Which is exactly why Sans did the first thing he could think about to effectively avoid it.

In a blink, a bony hand appeared out of nowhere and grabbed Grillby’s arm, and then he suddenly vanished from view after being yanked by said hand, while his bullets remained in place in the air
but quickly started falling due to gravity before they imploded into tiny, harmless shreds of magic. Sans froze in place, as he apparently needed to rethink his exact actions and fully process what he just did in the span of the past half second.

Which location did he focus on when he had shoved him through his shortcut, again? He remembered having the mental image of just about any kind of locked, inescapable room. Maybe he’d sent him in the small cave behind that big waterfall. That’s the sort of place he definitely wouldn’t be able to get out of all by himself. Whoops.

Weeeeelp. Problem… solved?

… Oh who was he kidding. He’d only made it worse.

Much, much worse.

It took maybe about a full half minute before Grillby could even wrap his mind around what had just happened. But when he saw the dark landscape of Waterfall, the loud, crushing sound of water near him, and the bioluminescent plant life surrounding what appeared to be a mini-cave behind a literal wall of water… Well, he had never stepped foot in this place in his past, that much was for sure; it appeared that when Sans had described his strange ability as ‘teleporting’, he had not lied after all.

Still. Fire elemental. Surrounded by water. Bad idea.

He pulled out his cell phone, pondering who he should call for help… But then again, when he gave another thorough look at the waterfall, it appeared that there was no way out of this room other than by going through it, and even if someone could bring him protection like an umbrella, he would still need to walk directly into the river, and he didn’t know how deep it was. So with or without help, there was no way he was going anywhere near that thing.

So… It did appear like his only real way out was through literal teleportation, after all. Which meant that the only person he could rely on was the one who had put him here in the first place. Just his luck.

Would Sans… really just leave him here? Part of him still wanted to hope and have some sort of lingering faith in what he had believed to be a rather funny and close friend for the past few years, but the more he thought about the facts, the more his cold reason told him that, demented as he had just proven to be… Maybe his friend really wasn’t one at all, in the end. And he was now paying the price for his kindness and gullibility. Maybe he should have killed that human when he had the chance…
Meh, who was he kidding. He wasn’t a murderer. He really didn’t have it in him anyway. Maybe it would have been easier if that human did turn out to have done some… well, human stuff. But even if Sans had kept it safe because it were harmless… It still remained a danger and major hindrance to monsterkind. The kingdom needed a lot more resources to survive, especially after what had happened with the last human. They needed the Surface, now more than ever. And they had six souls! Seven, even, if Sans bothered to share. Couldn’t he understand that…?

Well… It wasn’t like any of this would matter to him now.

He leaned his back against the wall facing the waterfall and let himself glide against its rocky yet smooth surface, slowly sitting on the floor and pondering his options… But soon, he just sighed in despair.

What could he do now…? He was definitely stuck.

“Howdy!”

Grillby jumped, then jerked his head towards the origin of that insufferably saccharine voice. Wait, was that… a tiny talking flower? He hadn’t seen vegetal monsters in years. Probably had to do with living in Snowdin. The cold weather definitely wasn’t good for them.

Then again, he sensed that there was something… off with this one. This did not feel like a monster at all, he knew that there was something, but he couldn’t put his finger on it.

“Boy, isn’t that unexpected.”

Whether the stranger had waited for an answer or not, he didn’t seem to care. Instead, he merely continued, always with that chirpy, seemingly childish voice:

“You know, I was never interested in you specifically, before. You always stay at your pub and all, it’s so boring. I mean, I don’t blame you for that, of course it’s just your job. But you’re quite the chill guy, you probably would’ve been a lot more fun to hang out with earlier if you weren’t always staying there all day.” Before the monster could even think of asking it what it was talking about, the flower beamed and cut him short, even if he had not even said anything yet. “But now! What a wonderful surprise it is to see you do new things like this! You’re a GEM, I’ll tell you that. And you know what? That thing you did was SO entertaining, I feel like rewarding you right now.”

An awkward silence fell in the room, save for the howling sound of the waterfall eternally falling a few feet away from them. They seemed to be on a staring contest, starting from that point.
... Grillby had so. Many questions.

“... Rewarding me.” he carefully repeated with an emotionless tone after some time, wary and skeptical.

“Yes!” it grinned. “I’m sure you must have a LOT of questions about what this mess was aaaaall about, don’t you?” Somehow, even without anything other than its stem to move around, it managed to make some sort of proud pose. “Luckily for you, I happen to know a *lot* of things about this place. I can explain everything you want.”

The bartender remained entirely still, staring at it. “........ I was actually expecting you to call for help and get me out of here, honestly.”

“Psh. Priorities, am I right?” the plant rolled its eyes, laughing as if it had heard something completely absurd. “I’m sure the trashbag will come back and get you, eventually.” It paused to think for a bit… then an evil, mocking smirk appeared on its face. “... Unless he doesn’t. In which case, yeah, I guess you’re in some pretty big trouble right now.”

............... Moving on from the fact that this strange talking creature was not lending the slightest bit of compassion or care to his situation and that for some reason, it seemed to see it as “entertaining” to an extent important enough that it was finding some reason to think of it as hilarious.

Grillby had no idea what this being, that he was now certain was *not* a monster, was here for, or *was* in general, but one thing he could tell was that it was not to be trusted.

Part of him found himself *still* hoping that Sans would actually come back, but…

Well, he still had some sort of evil demonic flower to keep distracted for the time being. Maybe playing its game would keep it from having… possibly deranged ideas. Chatting was harmless; and thankfully, being a bartender was a synonym to being a great listener, too.

Making it talk should keep it busy for some time. The best conversation starter came to his mind naturally:

“You know what Sans is doing. Don’t you.”
Flowey’s grin expanded, demonically slicing his entire face.

“Ooh, I can tell you a lot about him alright.”

Alphys was freaking out. Sans was walking rapidly in circles. Dawn was waiting patiently but worriedly in a corner.

“You got him stuck behind a WATERFALL!?” Alphys shrieked.

“look, i panicked, okay!?” he retorted hurriedly. Although he was still pacing, he tried to slow down and breathe, regaining his composure and ability to think. “i’ll go back to him and try to save the situation as much as it can be saved by now. in the meantime— al, i need you to put the time machine back to the way it was this morning as fast as you can, and reboot it. and dawn…”

When he met her eyes, his walking finally came to a stop. The human patiently waited for him to give her his orders without pressuring him, although she couldn’t help but look down in shame, thinking that he had to be hesitating because she was literally useless in this kind of situation and that, probably, involving her in anything right now would only make things worse.

Sans looked conflicted and terrified, at best. She could see him shaking and the sound of bones rattling sent shivers down her spine, even from a distance.

Eventually, he tore his pupils away from her and squinted his sockets to an extent she had never seen before, as he finally completed his sentence:

“… get ready to reset.”

Dawn’s eyes widened like saucers. “Wait, WHAT!?”

Her immediate outburst completely overpowered the sound of Alphys’s toolbox crashing to the ground.

“S-Sans,” she quickly added in a shy voice, “I’m n-not against it, but— are you sure…”

He sighed heavily, avoiding her look. “i definitely don’t want you to do it. but if we can’t find a
way to make sure he won’t tell on us, i think we won’t have any other choice than to erase that event from the timeline. i dunno, next time you’ll just go back to the basement and i’ll invite him for lunch and then make sure to keep him distracted, or…”

“I— I-I got that part.” she cut him short, shaking her head with her eyes closed and flailing her arms around nervously. “I’m just— I’ve never Reset before! I don’t even know how that’s supposed to work, or what I have to do, and— What if I mess up and go too far back in time or something? I don’t want to erase everything! And what about Alphys…”

At the mention of her name, they both went to stare anxiously at the lizard in question.

“I-I… I’ll be fine.” she assured, looking away. “Either way… I won’t even be able to tell the difference.” she smiled weakly.

This seemed to comfort Sans in his idea. Nonetheless… the arguments Dawn had pointed out brought an even more noticeable tension to him, as if he had just realized the possibility that, indeed, she might have a lot less control over her ability than he had assumed.

He should have expected this. This power was supposed to be literally against the most basic laws of nature. Of course he couldn’t expect anyone to figure out something that was supposed to be impossible to achieve in such a short time and without any sort of training or catalyst.

“look, i… i don’t know how time jumping works either— in your head, i mean. i know what’s going on with the universe when that happens, but i don’t know if that’ll help you figure it out and we don’t really have time for a thermodynamics lesson right now.” he mumbled uneasily. “just… look, if we turn on the machine again, no matter how far back you go, i’ll be able to catch up. even if, yeah, if you can go back to, uh, just about thirty minutes or an hour ago, that’ll be great. or just go back to this morning if it’s too hard to figure out, i don’t know.”

Panic seemed to have overcome him again, even if he marked a pause to try to take a breath. That could definitely not be good news.

“either way, i’d like the time machine to be ready before you do that. i don’t have any codeword for “we messed up and had to go back in time but the machine was out during that time”, so i don’t think it’d be a good idea for you to jump back if i won’t remember it. so take your time to just… wrap your head around it for now, i guess?” He stayed still for a few more seconds, tilting his skull repeatedly so he could look at both of them one after the other with an anxious look. “anyway, i really should go right now. can i count on you two for the backup plan…”

The girls shared a concerned look, but they quickly turned back towards him and assured him that the plan was understood and that they would follow it. Trusting them but not the least bit
reassured, Sans soon vanished.

Alphys immediately went back to work. Dawn considered offering her help in order to get the machine back in action sooner, but the way too fresh memory of the incident quickly came back, as well as the fact that they had agreed that she would stop helping in the basement in order to exactly stop this kind of accident from occurring again.

Besides, Sans had given her a very important mission as well. She had no idea how to go through with it and really hoped that it would not come down to this, but just in case… She had to prepare for this eventuality.

The ability to Reset was linked to the amount of determination someone, or something had (since Sans expected his machine to be able to act that way); and in her specific case, her determination, just like any human’s, was most probably gathered somewhere inside her SOUL.

So… Maybe she had to try to find that determination and use it for something? Which implied that she had to be more familiar with the fact that she now had a SOUL, first.

When Sans and Alphys had done this magic thing that made her SOUL visible, the first thing she had noticed was just how huge it felt. And Sans had confirmed it— it was apparently much bigger than the regular humans’ SOULs were supposed to look like. Also, no matter who had initiated the trick, that big heart stuck in her chest had looked cyan both times— unless it was turquoise…? She wondered if the SOUL traits could be considered to be some sort of spectrum, instead of distinct categories.

Either way, according to the game’s lore, it seemed that her trait was ‘Patience’… She had to admit, that was fitting, to some extent. But still… even though it had never been explicitly said through the canon, the fandom usually took it as obvious that Patience was the most passive trait— sort of like the opposite of determination.

She had never wanted this to be true and she had always thought that the amalgam ‘Patient means waiting it out and doing nothing’ was way too simplistic, as well as insulting and kind of infuriating. She was waiting a lot and she could stay still for relatively long periods of time alone with her thoughts, but it was only because she preferred judging when she was needed to stay on the sidelines, and when she was needed to act. She was not being passive; she simply saw it as, well, observing, and thinking before acting so she could make sure that when she did get on the move, it’d be to do something worth being done.

Most of the time, she knew what she wanted to do with her life, and there were few things that could deter her from doing what she wanted.

So… Yeah. She had to brush aside that fanon prejudice. She had determination, and she was going to use it if that was what she wanted to do.
The more she thought about these things, and the more she reminisced how it had felt when Sans or Alphys were doing their trick to show her SOUL around, the more she could now feel that *something* was indeed there, inside her chest, pounding at a slightly different rate than her regular heart. She would be lying if she said that this situation wasn’t weirding her out, but… She still felt some sort of fascination towards this novelty.

That, and the fact that she had a mission. She had to stay focused on the real goal, there.

Concentrating her attention on the feeling of her SOUL beating inside her chest became strangely soothing, after a certain point.

She was deliberately trying not to focus on the idea of Resets just yet in fear that just *thinking* about doing a Reset would accidentally trigger it too early, but in the meantime, this strange meditation made her feel like she was learning more about herself than she had ever before.

Waiting for Sans to return, either with good news or with the order to Reset, she closed her eyes and relaxed, lulled by the funny rhythm the desynchronization between her heart and her SOUL created. She had always loved music, and she found this one especially inspiring.

Listening to the music of her life, she would wait.

She would be Patient.

“......... A video game.” Grillby deadpanned. “Is that all? I didn’t expect you to tell the truth, but I thought you’d give a story a bit more credible than this.”

“Oh, you don’t believe me?” Flowey pretended to look offended, but it was obvious that it was merely mockingly so. “It’s *really* easy to prove, you know.”

The monster merely shook his head in disbelief.

Alternate universes, he could wrap his mind around it. Sans often mentioned something about alternate timelines when he was drunk. An alternate universe where the laws of physics were different and magic was not a common part of it, he could imagine it. Well, he had trouble figuring out what exactly it could look like and how the people living in that sort of world could deal with their daily lives without having the possibility to use magic, but why not.

But then. Sans remembering time loops? The last human being controlled by *another* human from one of these worlds who was playing a video game? *This* was ridiculous.
“This doesn’t make sense.” he huffed sternly. “Video games run on numbers and scripts, if I’m not mistaken. I may not be a scientist, but as far as I’m concerned, reality doesn’t work that way.” He looked around them in the small cave, giving lazy nods towards the mushrooms and other members of the local ecosystem: “Does all of this look like a video game to you? Strangely, I don’t seem to see that many pixels.”

“Well, sure, when you see it like that, I guess you won’t get to see it that easily.” the flower rolled its eyes, mocking annoyance and disinterest. “But if you know how to look at it properly…”

The being locked its eyes on him, gazing with an eerie intensity. Grillby felt watched in a way that he was certain he had never experienced before.

Suddenly the flower’s smirk expanded horrendously.

Grillby was not given the chance to say or do anything to question this behavior, because immediately something appeared out of nowhere, without making any sound.

* GRILLBY 28 ATK 17 DEF
* Clearly needs a reality check.

“… You can get some very precious information about the people around you, thanks to this.” it continued, grinning like a demon but sounding carefree and delighted as ever. “You get to learn a lot of things about your surroundings and neighbors. What they’re like. What they do in their lives. Their strengths… Their weaknesses.” There was a small humorous huff when it read the flavor text. “Hee hee. Maybe you do need someone to help you set things straight. I guess little old me will have to do.”

“T-this is… What is this?” Grillby nervously and cautiously walked closer to the hovering, yet immobile black rectangle. He tried to observe it under a few different angles, but quickly discontent washed over him as he fully regained his composure. “….. You’re the one making this, right. This is just a bullet shaped like a pixelated box.”

“Well duh, of course I’m doing this.” It rolled its eyes again, as if all he had said was nothing but random absurdities. Again. “The game’s the one making up the numbers for most monsters here, though.”

The fire elemental carefully took a few steps back when the flower made its way closer to the pixel-y floating dialogue box, not the least bit fazed by a view that definitely did not belong in this world.
Then again, if it were the one who created it in the first place as he was guessing, it was only normal to not be surprised by your own abilities; but on the other hand... The more he stared at this otherworldly shape, standing eerily still and frozen in space and time, the more he was convinced that if, indeed, the flower was the one doing it... The raw power and control it had over its magic capabilities attained extremely worrying levels he had never seen in his life, let alone dared imagine.

The pure perfection in the shape of this rectangle and its letters, the perfection of its stillness, the perfection of its colors and how perfectly clear the separation between the black and white parts were... Even if the feeling it diffused made it clear that it was composed of nothing but pure, basic magic, and was supposed to act just like any sort of bullet of the most regular kind, Grillby had never seen this kind of flawless mastery before.

Even the bullets of the most talented monsters had some sort of flaw in their symmetry, or would move in small, irregular patterns due to the influence of parameters the monster had no control upon, such as potential winds or local gradients in temperature or magic concentration.

This perfection arriving from outside of time and space... This was not only unnatural. This was literally thwarting all the laws of physics he knew and had never learned about.

“I don’t think any player got to see your stats before, what with you never going out to fight.” A thin yet flexible vine rose out of the ground and went to gently touch the numbers on the flying black screen, as the flower watched it with amusement. “They’re not too bad, I guess. Maybe they’d be higher if you got to some more serious training from time to time.”

The vine lightly poked the bottom right corner of the box, and immediately the text disappeared and the rectangle rapidly shrank until the window it represented became too small to keep track of.

That was definitely not how magic bullets were supposed to disintegrate when their summoner dismissed them.

Grillby was still far from convinced, but even if he did not count the small doubts that started to form in his mind, the mere thought was enough.

Even if this “video game” talk were nothing but an absurd fabrication coming from the mouth of a being who was obviously lying through its teeth, denying the veracity of this preposterous tale would only leave him with the idea that this tiny talking flower, who would hypothetically have enough power to pull this off without any visible effort, would have made everything up just to mess with his mind and drive him insane.

Which, admittedly, was actually starting to work.

The flower went back to staring at him with that same cheery grin and those soul-devouring eyes.
I’m not gonna lie: under the game’s perspective, you’re pretty boring. I don’t know what the players find in you, you hardly ever say any lines! You’re just some random background NPC. You never even get out of your pub.” It had said all this with a dejected, almost disappointed tone… Yet, immediately it bobbed its face up and down in extreme delight. “That’s why this is so exciting! It’s the first time I’ve had something new about you in FOREVER! Sure, there’s probably not much going on in your life since you do exactly the same thing every day even without counting the Resets, but still! Now you’re out of the loop! There’s GOT to be something interesting we can do with this, don’t you think?”

...Define “interesting.”, Grillby did not dare say out loud. He should definitely not encourage it.

For some very strange and unexpected reason, his instincts told him that he did not want to find out what this thing’s definition of the term was.

Sadly, he quickly found out that he did not really have a say in the matter. The being came to face him eagerly in what he quickly recognized to be a battle stance, and it gave him an encouraging and enthusiastic look. Definitely not willing to battle that thing but definitely not willing to die stupidly because he would not even try to defend himself, the monster found no other choice but to at least stand on his feet and brace himself for whatever was going to happen.

The one thing he had not planned for, was for the entirety of the world to turn to black and disappear.

He looked around in panic, but there really was nothing more around them other than himself and the Thing. Well, not for long: as soon as the flower asked him rhetorically if he was ready (he was obviously not, but it wasn’t like it would care for his opinion), multiple other dialogue box-shaped bullets appeared between them, this time going in a variety of colors, sizes and contents in the text and numbers they displayed. Grillby recognized some that were probably meant to look like button options, and some voice in the back of his mind snarked that he knew he should have taken some time to play some video games with his young son more often, because if he had then at least maybe he wouldn’t feel that lost and disoriented at the options laid before him.

“This is what the fights look like in the game. Well, technically they’re called ‘Encounters’ instead, but you get my point.” the thing explained excitedly. Then it showed a wide grin. “So! Convinced yet?”

If this meant that it would leave him alone, Grillby was very willing to say ‘yes’ just to please it and hope that it would free him from whatever this void place was.

When it saw his slow nod, though, it appeared that it had wished for a more expressive response. Too bad, because he was not going to freak out openly on that thing. He could not afford to show
any sort of weakness right now.

“Aw, come on! This is going to be fun!” it called out impatiently, with the exact same tone as the one of an innocent child asking a grown-up to play with it. “Try to do something!”

The last thing he wanted to do was to play along in such unnatural setting, but once more, he quickly reasoned that following that ungodly brat’s wishes would be the best way he would maximize his chances of survival. Grillby looked down at the buttons laid before him, not so willing to enter this sociopath’s game, but at least confused and concerned enough to look for answers.

While the ‘FIGHT’ option appeared somewhat tempting given the circumstances, he wanted to stay prudent. It was foolish to attack something when you didn’t even know just how powerful it could be, and if that damned creature was indeed the one creating all of this, then challenging it to an actual magic fight was beyond suicidal.

He gave a quick look at his other options, and thought that the button ‘ACT’ was probably the more appealing option. ‘Acting’ would surely give him a wider range of actions he could indeed pull off, assuming the name was to be trusted. However… When he tried to lift an arm and press that button, nothing happened.

He struggled. Couldn’t move his body.

He tried to speak. He found himself unable to do so.

The flower’s demonic face was the most hideous and horrifying image he had ever laid eyes upon.

“You can’t.” it smirked in sadistic victory. “Because this isn’t your turn.”

The fire elemental kept trying to fight against this invisible, ruthless force that maintained him paralyzed in place, but it was hopeless.

Just what kind of sorcery was this…? This thing was doing this, it had to. But if he had to choose between these phenomena being caused by a video game of some kind, or being the effects of some sick creature’s evil intents… He could not fathom the extent of the power it would hold— let alone when its intentions were so malevolent.

Grillby found himself believing that he almost preferred the option that his reality was a video game. This thought… He was not sure whether he should find it revolting or appealing, given the current circumstances.

“So! It’s my turn!” it exclaimed excitedly, stating the cruel obvious state of reality. “Hey, you wanna know what’s going to happen if I press that ‘FIGHT’ button?”
He could not move. Aiming just about any sort of blow against him would be so easy. Had this been why so many monsters had died to the hands of a human *child*, including the best soldiers of the entire kingdom? Had this been because they literally couldn’t dodge or defend themselves against any of the attacks launched at them…? When this human child was roaming through the Underground still alive, was this what they used to kill their victims? Humans were not supposed to be able to use magic—not in such way. So if the human was not doing this… What did?

Struggling but unable to move even a single finger, when the flower’s vine came closer to that FIGHT button as he could do nothing but listen to that psychopathic laugh, the revelation finally hit him once and for all. After all, how else could he explain everything that had happened so far?

The flower had been right all along.

This was a video game. He was in a video game, he was nothing but a meaningless NPC spending the entirety of his existence in his pitiful pub, and he was going to die.

Just as the vine was approaching dangerously this accursed button and about to press it, it stopped. The creature extended its stem so its face could make its way over the dialogue boxes and come to smile at him from up close.

“Hee hee hee, you should see your face. Come on, I was just kidding! Killing you isn’t fun. Not when you can do so many things OTHER than being dead! Being dead is *boring*, right?”

Before he could process what was happening, the stem retracted back to its former place, and the vine reappeared to press two other buttons he did not bother to read.

Soon, the flavor text shown on his side of the ‘battle screen’ changed to display a new sentence:

* Flowey is sparing you.

Grillby realized he could move again. Instead of pressing any buttons, he used this newfound mobility to nervously step back until he bumped into the wall behind him.

The flower’s smirk of deep satisfaction was wider than ever.

Thank the Angel, when he did collide with that wall, he realized that the black void had faded to leave them exactly in the same place they were standing in before this whole thing had occurred. The buttons and boxes were still there, but they quickly vanished as well.
He was shaking way too much for him to not collapse on the ground and sit in a rush. The intensity of his flames could have disguised his tremors as just their crackling, but this hurried gesture could not be brushed off so easily.

“So! What did you think of your first REAL fight, huh?” God, would that thing ever give him a break? “What? You don’t have any thoughts to share with me?”

If his words were scarce, his glare was hopefully talkative enough. Couldn’t this thing just leave him alone? Wasn’t proving its point enough as it was…?

“Ooh, I see what it is. It’s that whole “I’m just a video game character and I might not even be real and why should life even matter” train of thought, isn’t it. Tsh.”

It rolled its eyes as if this “train of thought” were about the stupidest topic it had ever heard of. But what about it? Shouldn’t this “Flowey” entity be just as much a “character” of that game as he was…?

But if it indeed were, then how could it have known about all this? How could it do what it had just done? Instinctively, Grillby assumed that if no monster in the Underground had been aware of this mechanism before, then maybe it meant that it had to be an ability specific to some very particular entities…

And if this world were indeed confined inside a video game, then the entities in question would be, namely, the players in control of this world and its destiny. Did that mean that ‘Flowey’ was a player itself…?

He knew far too little to find any decisive conclusion, and he was far too tired and done to care. He just wanted this to be over. He just wanted to be left alone, and…

… And what, exactly? Even if he could get out of this place, what would he do with this knowledge? Could he just go back to his life and greet his neighbors so obliviously, when he now knew the truth about their own existence?

Almost as if it could still prove that it could feel empathy after what had happened, Flowey came over to him gently and whispered in what sounded like a caring tone:

“Hey, don’t worry about all this. There’s going to be a Reset, sooner or later. You won’t remember a thing. You’ll get to go back to live your boring life without having to question any of this
anymore.”

Did it have any idea that saying this was not helping?
Judging how it immediately dropped the reassuring face and came back to its cheery grin, definitely so.

“Unless you want me to come back to you and give you a little reminder in the next timeline? Just ask!”

It stayed in place, still and patient, for a time that felt way too long for what this thing seemed to be used to.
He merely turned his head resolutely so he would stare at anything but where it was standing.
He wasn’t looking so he could not notice, but at some point the flower froze in place, as if it had just realized something.

“Oh… Looks like it’s almost time for me to make my leave.” it said dejectedly. “Well, now or never, friend! I asked you a question, didn’t you hear?”

Once more, he was only greeted with silence and stillness.
He was not going to give it that credit.
Sighing, Flowey shook its face in overdramatic discontent.
“… Well, I’ll take that as a ‘no’ then. I’ll just let you know, that’s disappointing, I had a lot of fun here. First time in a looooonng while.”

Just be gone already. What could even make that thing feel the need to leave in the first place, anyway?
… No, this wasn’t the right question to ask.
The real question was, did he still have the energy to muster the intent to care about the answer?

Coincidentally or not, about a minute later, a certain skeleton appeared out of thin air and landed near the waterfall. Look who finally decided to show up.

The little guy looked at him with concern and fear, not daring to make any step closer without his
permission.

In response, Grillby remained mute and still. Did he know about this “video game” situation? According to what ‘Flowey’ had said, his plan not only proved that he fully acknowledged its existence, but also that he was focusing on “freeing” them from that game’s influence. Just that.

Was that what Sans had had to deal with for so long…? No wonder he drank so much when he thought his brother wouldn’t notice, and no wonder he became so cynical and depressed whenever his mental filters were inhibited.

“… hey.” Sans greeted shyly when he could not bear the silence anymore. He raised his left hand and showed a heavy looking plastic bag. “i brought the grub. it’s not as good as your food, but… i guess dawn tried her best. the sandwiches taste ok.”

The bartender sighed, then looked away.

If he already knew what kind of existence they had and that their entire universe was bent to the will of nothing but a simple machine remote-controlled by humans of all things… What was even the point?

He had stopped caring, probably somewhat reasonably so. Well no, it was far from reasonable; but if he were to be stuck in time loops and live every iteration with this unbearable knowledge, how else could he keep his sanity and stop hurting his own feelings…?

Carefully, the young skeleton went to sit down next to him against the same wall. The fire elemental came to think that since he had not witnessed his discussion with Flowey, maybe he did not know that now he knew, and…

What if he were doing this solely for his sake?

That would be sweet and a nice thanking gesture for the gifts he had given him earlier, but…

“You only came to keep me company for a little while and then let me fade out here, didn’t you…?”

“wha— no, of course not!” Sans looked genuinely hurt and horrified to hear that his friend could ever have such idea in mind. “grillbs, no matter what happens, i’ll get you outta here.”

“Why? Aren’t you worried that I’ll tell the others as soon as I get out? I’m just wasting your time, here. Aren’t I?”
He gave him a worried pair of glowing pupils, but soon he could not afford to raise them towards him. “well… yeah, the safety of the plan’s comin first. but still. the worst that could happen is that if you don’t want to believe us…” He scratched the back of his spine awkwardly. Bad sign. “well, i’ve told the human to jump back in time so you’d forget all about this. would be easy from that point to make sure that accident won’t happen again.” Finally he managed to raise his skull again and let a bright expression of despaired hope shine in his sockets. “but… i’d really prefer if we didn’t have to do that.”

Well… Now that he already knew what he was about to tell him about his plan, it probably was going to make things a lot easier. While he still had to wrap his mind around why exactly Sans would have needed to bring an overpowered human from another dimension for his plan, he could not deny that he fully trusted him regarding his intentions.

Sans offered him one of the sandwiches. He took it politely.

It took him a few moments to realize that Sans was shaking.

“… l-look, i’n. i’n sorry i panicked. for real.” The short skeleton buried his skull between his hands and knees, moaning in guilt. “i didn’t wanna fight you, and if we’d fought then the others could’ve found out, and… i’m really sorry i brought you here. i didn’t think.” He slowly raised his skull back, sending a shy and concerned look at him. “h-how are you holding up, by the way…? do you want me to take us elsewhere for this? i could find a more comfy place to talk. warmer one, too.”

Grillby turned his head away from him, tightening the grip on his crossed, nervous arms. “… It’s fine. Doesn’t matter.”

In the end, it wasn’t that much different from Snowdin. What was ice anyway, if not water about to melt. He just had to look out for puddles, and… that giant screaming wall of death facing them.

Would the waterfall really harm him if it were happening outside of a ‘FIGHT’? He wondered if all these times when monsters would accidentally hurt themselves for just about any reason, some sort of invisible ‘FIGHT’ was triggered somehow and they received damage.

Did they have ‘Hit Points’? All video games had that, right? How many did he have left…?

Sans took a long breath. Apparently, he was not ready to explain anything. And now that he knew what he was about to tell, he could not blame him for being nervous and fearing being taken for even more of a madman than he already had appeared to sound earlier.
“so… i’ll be honest, i’m not really sure where to begin. there’s really a lot to it.”

“….. Maybe starting from the beginning would be best.” Grillby tried to encourage.

“heh. true.” he chuckled. “so… what exactly do you know? guess i’ll just try to take it from there.”

So he was letting him choose the conversation starter, huh.

Grillby hesitated, but as he thought back of what had all happened before he arrived… He honestly couldn’t care less about answers. He had had more than enough already.

Part of him argued that maybe keeping Sans up to date with this encounter would be preferable, but… He really just didn’t want to talk about it. Chances were, if he could remember the time loops and knew about the game’s existence already, he wouldn’t be teaching him anything new. He probably had met that thing himself in the past.

So instead of talking about the unpleasant present…

“I know that you and your brother moved in from Hotland about three years ago. We first met when you came at the bar some time after that...” he said, reminiscing the events with a fondness he had never truly had the opportunity to discover, let alone cherish. “You hated the fact that you had to move at all. I remember you saying that it was your foster family’s idea and that you didn’t have a say in it because your brother made the final decision.”

“yeah, totally got me.” Sans laughed. “crazy how people can change. i would’ve never guessed i’d ever feel at home in this ol’ town. yet here we are.”

“I remember the day you two arrived. Your brother was doing his best to be the sweetest neighbor we could have...
... You showed up later, wearing thongs and sunglasses. You even had that stupid shirt with the palm trees on it.”

Grillby chuckled warmly as he recollected the improbable scene and how the first image the townsfolk had had of the pair had been that of Papyrus discovering his brother with shock, only to scold him for almost half an hour in the middle of the streets about how he had asked him to make an effort to look friendly and ‘blend in’ so they would not disturb the inhabitants from their daily lives and adapt to the local quietness because that was exactly what they had moved in for. If that wasn’t a perfect first impression.
“Talk about provocation. It was obvious how much you didn’t want to be here.”

Sans was laughing along, the same tone of nostalgia in his voice. “heh heh eh... good times. i kept gettin stares for a week and whenever they mentioned the event i’d pull out the sunglasses and a punchline. everybody was always askin where the glasses were comin from. nobody ever figured out i was literally just teleportin them.”

So that was how he did it. Magic trick up his sleeves, riiight. More like magic superpower unjustly accorded to a skilled conman with the tendency to make terrible jokes.

Then again, in retrospect, a lot of his pranks were twice as hilarious now that he knew how he had been doing them.

Part of him was now genuinely impressed and somewhat infuriated that nobody had ever found out that he could use some kind of teleportation, himself included. Now that he knew, some occurrences were just so obvious. How had he not found out earlier? Was denial really that strong an influence so it could bend perception to such extent?

As he reminisced his own memories, Sans eventually sighed. “i guess y’could say that’s the only good thing that came out of the accident... kinda. really wasn’t worth the effort though.” Seeing Grillby’s confused look, he immediately added: “don’t get me wrong, that’s a super cool power and i got used to having it probably a bit too much by now, so i’d totally have trouble adjustin to things if i lost it. but if it meant that could set things back to normal... i’d do it without any second thoughts.”

“You had an accident...?” the fire elemental asked in surprise in-between two bites. The sandwich really didn’t taste as bad as it looked, after all.

“yep. very bad one, at that.”

“Were there ever any good ones?”

Sans snorted. “true. unless you count That One With the Glasses.”

“...... You’re still forbidden from even looking at my cellar.” he glared coldly.

“come on, you and i both know that i was the one who saved it. i was innocent, this time! without me you would’ve all been doomed, by wine or by fire.”
Honestly, Grillby neither needed nor wanted a reminder.

“Could you remind me why I haven’t just banned you yet?”

“‘cause startin from the day i showed up your pub started getting thrice as much attention?”

He… legitimately did not have any counter argument to this. Sans did attract customers like a magnet, for some *unexplainable* reason. “... Seems valid.”

In response to the bartender’s mockingly defeated shrug, the skeleton chuckled lightly. Grillby realized just how long it had been since he last saw him laugh with an actual, unhinged sincerity… But this was not one of those times.

Despite everything, a weight remained.

“...... Getting back to this accident you mentioned. Is this where you got your health issue? I heard you liked sparring until you got... “sick.” When you said it wasn’t worth it, is that what you meant? And what exactly did you mean by “normal”...?”

A part of him that he now wanted to silence wondered how this ‘health issue’ would transcribe according to the video game rules. If he assumed that the system of HP was indeed in use, would this mean that something went wrong with his HP…? That would explain why battling would be too dangerous for him.

Some other part of him also started making random connections between different elements he had gathered. If Sans knew about this video game problem and had had some sort of “accident”… Could it be that the two were somehow related?

Looking at the skeleton’s reaction, something was indeed blatantly hurting him; but he realized that he was off track.

“… well, that too, i guess.” he murmured tiredly, shrugging and seemingly deliberately avoiding his last question. “but what i really had in mind is that… we lost someone really important on that day.”

In a matter of seconds, everything suddenly clicked. All the pieces of the puzzle Grillby had collected throughout the years were now connected… or, well, almost. But at least, now he knew
enough that he could very easily deduce where this conversation was going.

“When you were drunk, it was common that you’d mention your father, and you said once that the move was related to the fact that they wanted you to move on from his death…?”

He had never taken it seriously, and even now, even if he was ready to hear just about anything and trust his words without checking… Something just wasn’t making sense.

“But the odd thing is… Everyone knows the man died more than twenty years ago. It’s… strange that you would remember him at all. Wouldn’t you have been a toddler at that time?”

Sans refrained a sarcastic huff. “… yeah. odd, huh.”

Grillby was not sure whether the waterfall’s current could have received some sort of strong and sudden draft, but he felt like this sharp and desperately cold answer had dropped a bucket full of freezing water on his head.

It burned, it hurt, and it felt hopelessly cold and lonely.

Sans took a stiff breath, avoiding his look.

“grillby, i’ve… look, i’ve never been able to tell anyone about this before. only alphys knows ‘cause she was there at the time. i’m not even sure the human knows. but, long story short… the accident wasn’t from twenty years ago. it actually happened three years ago.” There was a tense silence. From the strained expression in his sockets and strained clenching teeth, it almost looked as if the skeleton was repressing a sob. “when i arrived, everyone thought it was normal that he’d died so long ago. it’s like if everything he’d done in the past years had just— never happened. nobody understood why i missed him now and not earlier, but… it’s just that he was still there at that time, okay? he’s…”

When he felt a flaming, yet comforting and genuinely sympathetic hand on his left shoulder, he understood that in the middle of his rambling, he had started shaking. When he raised his skull and tilted it to his side, he met the bartender’s confused, but compassionate look.

“… You don’t have to continue if it’s too hard.” he muttered cautiously. “I think talking about it would help you feel better about this issue, but… It’s no use if you feel like you have to.”
“i… well, i said it before. keepin secrets sucks. but it’s… even now, i just literally CAN’T tell anyone about it. i mean now you look like you’d believe me, but it’s… hard. i guess part of me still thinks this can’t be real. this is too good to be true.”

An incredulous laugh stiffly came out.

“look, i’ll just drop the fact that al tried to get a therapist for me, but that didn’t really work out. the lady wouldn’t get a thing. all i got out of it was a stupid pet rock to take care of. so i kinda just… got used to dealin with the fact that even if i tried to be honest, nobody’d ever get it…?”

He looked away, his pupils dimming dangerously in despair.

“even al. she’s known the whole thing for years by now, but… she doesn’t remember my dad at all. she can’t understand how it feels.”

This all but confirmed what Grillby had to do. Or rather, what he should avoid doing, at least at the moment.

The poor guy was obviously not ready; whatever he was thinking about, whatever it was that he had been through, he was hurting even through the mere reminiscence of the events. He had never seen him so… vulnerable.

Thankfully, he did not currently feel the curiosity or urge to obtain answers. The conclusion was obvious, and he did not hesitate further before sharing his decision with the young monster. Said decision was met with great shock:

“you’re gonna believe me? just like that? you’re not even gonna ask about the human, or…?” Sans was sincerely dumbfounded by his choice. Maybe, in fact, this only made him fearful and warier about what could lie underneath: “… you’re not gonna gather a mob as soon as i get you outta here, are you?”

Grillby vigorously shook his head, sending soothing flames around and calmly confirming that he had no such intention, at least not anymore.

“…… Look, Sans.” he sighed, looking away. Yet it felt like there was some small joking tone in his words and attitude, as if he could almost see him smile. “After what I’ve seen, I’d believe just about anything you’d say without questioning it. You’d tell me that you’re secretly a human mage in hiding, I’d still believe you and leave you be.”
Sans snorted. “psh. where did you even get that idea? the shortcut thing?”

The bartender shrugged playfully. “Maybe. I can’t even feel you using your magic when you’re doing it. That definitely should raise some red flags.”

That made the young skeleton laugh all the more openly, as he retorted that this only confirmed that it was now clear that the elder would tell on him as soon as they would get out. His chuckles were amazingly contagious.

When the laughs calmed down, a serene silence came and let them breathe in peace for a few minutes.

“Still... Can I at least say something about all this?” The skeleton sent him a confused pair of pupils, but his skull soon nodded tentatively. “I hope I understood at least the most important part. But if you’ll allow me... Maybe you should look after your relatives more. Especially at times like these.”

Sans stiffened. “don’t— i care about my family.” he retorted uneasily. “i really do, i just…”

“I’m not saying that you don’t. I’m saying that because you have lost some of them... You seem to forget the ones who are still here.” he explained calmly. “I’m not so much saying this for us, but rather for your own sake. I know we’re not family and that we won’t ever be able to replace the ones you lost, but when you moved in town… You made a new family here, in a way. Didn’t you?”

The young monster relaxed a bit and smiled weakly yet sincerely at the comforting thought. He still looked like he wanted to fight against the idea and find arguments of his own, but it was probably more for the sake of arguing more than because he was completely disagreeing.

“It’s amazing that you’re actually able to save… almost everyone. But if you only focus on saving them and that in the meantime you stay so reclusive and alone… You’re doing a lot more harm to yourself than you realize, I’m sure.” he added. “With such high stakes… You need to hold on to your sanity one way or another. Staying close to the ones who can support you even a little is the best solution I could think of.”

Damn, he really knew how to make his soul melt in pure warm-heartedness, didn’t he. That guy really was the best bartender in the whole world. Not only was his food the absolute best, he was
also the best listener, and when his turn came to talk… He surely had the best words, too. And
damn did he care a lot about his regulars. All of his regulars.

“I’ll be frank.” Grillby added after another silence, looking at the now empty bag Sans had
brought. “When you mentioned having lunch, this isn’t what I had in mind.”

There was a blunt snort. “yeah, me neither.”

“I mean, it’s… I feel like we both needed this.” he admitted calmly. “Although I could have done
without this whole reality-breaking mess.”

tell me ‘bout it.” Sans took a chunk out of his ketchup bottle. He quickly paused, then raised a
hesitant look: “speaking of which, with that whole thing about keepin a human around…”

Grillby took a heavy breath. “... It’s alright. From what I’ve seen so far... I think the less we think
about it, the better.”

Honestly, Sans felt the same. He confirmed that verbally absent-mindedly but with relief, and soon
looked for something to change the subject.

Fortunately, he quickly found one, as he magically pulled a white rectangular device from
seemingly nowhere.

“hey, wanna see something cool?”

“.......... What are you doing?”

Sans grinned trollesquely. “just wait ‘till you see the human’s face. gonna be a blast.”

When both monsters appeared in the living room, they were alone. Sans quickly deduced that the
girls had to still be in the basement, and after all, they probably had had nothing else to do in the
meantime. When he was given the possibility to accompany the short skeleton downstairs, Grillby
hesitated, but soon decided to follow his lead.

The reunion was obviously held with shock and concern, but after Sans simply explained how the
situation had evolved with just one sentence (“relax, he’s cool now.”), the tension quickly loosened. The awkwardness, less so.

“eh, it’s ok. the human doesn’t bite.” he chuckled while nudging the tall fire elemental at his side, seeing that he was still standing stiff and as close to the door as possible.

Dawn rolled her eyes jokingly, but did not seem too offended by her implied comparison with a wild animal. Surely this was a common prejudice among monsters anyway, especially so after what they had been through.

She felt uncomfortable at the idea that she might have to go through some more discriminatory situations of various degrees, but at least she could understand where these were coming from. At least, she reasoned that if “specism” was a thing similar to how it went in some fan-stories, discrimination against humans was a lot more justified than the other way around.

“So… H-hey?”

She tried saluting Grillby again, just as shyly as the first time, hoping that it would not give the same result. Thankfully, this time, the monster returned her shy wave with a similar one and an almost inaudible “..... hey.” The awkwardness remained for a few more minutes during which various introductions were made and civil apologies were exchanged, but a few jokes here and there gradually yet quickly eased everyone into a warmer atmosphere, and soon the four could discuss freely.

“Also, Sans, am I gonna get my phone back?”

The fire elemental immediately sent him a dirty look. Yep, he was totally responsible for the disappearance of her phone, and he knew it.

Sans merely shrugged and gave it back to her without giving it much thought, but as soon as she turned it on, her expression fell to a mixture between bafflement and rage.

“oh yeah, forgot to tell ya sooner, but makin a counterclockwise spiral isn’t the most imaginative you could’ve come up with, y’know.” he chuckled. “anyway, i hope you like the new wallpaper. looks a lot better than that dumb selfie anyway.”

“… Moving on.” the human teenager grumbled, turning her device’s screen off and burying it in one of her jeans’ back pockets. “Are you guys gonna talk about that ‘TKI’ thing?” she immediately asked with a smug smile and playful eyebrows. “I’ve been wondering how anyone could ever put
Intense surprise washed over both men, but when they exchanged a quick look and reminisced the events, they remembered that they had indeed mentioned it at some point in their argument when she was still around.

“It’s better if you did not know.” Grillby deadpanned with what almost looked like an expression of fear and disgust.

“just drop it. grillbs and i agreed to never talk about it again, and trust me when i say that there’s a very good reason for that.” Sans nodded solemnly.

“Ha. You know what? If you get to steal my phone every five minutes and try to guess my password, then I get to ask you about it whenever I want and try to guess what that whole thing was about.”

Another look was exchanged. Sans snorted, then openly started laughing deeply and somberly with a menacing grin.

“fair enough.” he shrugged jokingly. “you’re still never gonna find out, though.”

“I wouldn’t want to deter you, but I’m fairly certain that your imagination isn’t enough to even begin to fathom what happened on that day.” Grillby quickly eyed Sans and muttered heavily: “... In fact, now that I know what you’re capable of with those new tricks of yours, I finally understand HOW you did it.” He looked to the distance and shuddered somberly. “It only makes it even worse.”

Yeah, if anything, that only made her even more determined to find out, because dang did that seem to have been something huge.

This was why, for the next few dozen minutes, the four spent the rest of lunch in the living room, listening to the human’s first guesses while eating the rest of the mini sandwiches she had prepared. None of her hypotheses were even near what had really transpired, if both Sans and Grillby were to be trusted, but at least they sure had a blast listening to all the nonsensical ideas she came up with.

Once lunch was over with, Grillby excused himself but offered to come back if he could be of some assistance. Sans quickly seized the opportunity.
“hey dawn, can i talk to you for a minute…?” His uneasy tone had an immediate effect on the one he had directed this question to. She silently nodded and turned fully towards him, wordlessly asking him to continue: “i was thinkin. do you… have some friends or family back in your world?” He scratched the back of his skull awkwardly. “i mean, ‘f course you do, but… you must miss’em, don’t you?”

“… Yeah?” She looked down, biting her lip guiltily. She appeared to feel conflicted and homesick, and she was trying to hide it. “I… I know I’ll get to see them again when we’re done. I mean, you’re not gonna go back on that part of the plan, will you?”

“nah, bud, ‘f course not. i promised, remember?”

She cracked an almost sad and guilty, yet somehow soft and warmhearted smile as she gently released a breath she had not realized she had been holding.

“Yeah. You did. I’m saying it again, but, it really means a lot that you did, of all people.” she smiled softly. “So… I guess I do miss them, but… I’ve been trying not to think about it too often. That just makes it… harder? For no reason, at that. I’ll get to see them again, eventually, so, I just have to wait and do everything I can to help in the meantime, right?”

The expression on Sans’s skull fell to the extent that his ever stuck smile now obviously showed that it was not genuine to the least.

Grillby’s words about ‘putting your feelings for your relatives behind your duties’ resonated in his mind, and he looked away. Well, he hadn’t said it that way, but it was the idea that he had tried to convey.

Sans realized that maybe this attitude was one thing he had in common with that kid, but… What he could read clearly on her face was that contrary to him, she had not had a lifetime worth of time shenanigans to distance herself from her family and friends and unwillingly stop hurting so much from the separation.

She was hurting, and since he had been the one to rip her apart from her family in the first place, he was the one to blame for that heartache. And even if she knew that as well, all she was saying, with pure honesty, was that she wanted to brush that pain past her for his own sake. Yikes.

Taking a deep breath, he blinked himself out of his thoughts before raising his skull to face her
again. Was he really about to say this…?

“… ok. um. so… if i told you that i could make it so you can at least talk to them. right here, right now. would you want me to do it?”

The way the light of hope illuminated her widening, bewildered eyes, was the only answer he needed.

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Chapter Notes

This chapter was a nightmare to write, and you have no idea how glad I am that I finally got rid of it. Finding the right balance between plot needs, character realism and entertainment value was a torture in this specific chapter, because compared to the earlier ones, this is a chapter in which, in the grand scheme of things, not much happens. And yet, the consequences are just big enough to make it absolutely mandatory.

Anyway. I'm positive that this chapter is one of the biggest letdowns in the story of this fanfic, but hopefully I'll get the next chapters done soon as a compensation ^^'

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Learn When to Quit

— Act 1 —

Don’t Let Him Find Out

Scene 5.1

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This is the main index where you can choose which way you wish to read the chapter.

Read via Screenshots Here (full formatting but may encounter loading issues)

Read Plain Text Here (formatting limited to what AO3 can do)
Dawn was not exactly sure what to think, when he so bluntly yet casually mentioned that at any moment he could have allowed her to choose whoever she wanted from her original world. Of course, the first emotion she had felt was utter joy, and only when she felt that joy did she understand how much she really missed her family and friends after just one day. But soon, this euphoric happiness had to let her rational part fall like an anvil: because if she really could have stayed in contact with them, she had not for the past twenty-and-something hours. It meant two things. The first one was, her previous belief that time would function differently in the two worlds was most certainly wrong. The second was, she passed at a similar enough rate in both worlds.
would be able to have an intelligible conversation. Everyone had been left without any news regarding whereabouts for the past twenty-and-something years. Her parents *had* to be incredibly worried, and she knew everyone hanging on the server, waiting eternally for a *Undertale* livestream that would never take place. She *had* to let them know she was alright.

She followed Sans hurriedly, until they were back in the basement and facing that giant *Matrix*-whatever thing.

She watched the skeleton flip the switches hastily. She had just now realized that he might not have wanted to get in trouble because of him kidnapping her for the Sake of Saving the World. For that, or for whatever kind of motive he had for so suddenly changing her, depending on whether he had always had this fake and wanted to keep it secret until then, or if he had forgotten about it and was somehow just reminding her of it.

Dawn’s previous thoughts regarding her situation in the machine of his worked rushed back in her head as she watched him settle the sciencey-magicky parameters needed to be settled before the connection between the real world and the current virtual one they were in could be restored. Yet, she found herself thinking the more she was trying to rationalize its mechanism, the less sense she could make of it. Maybe...
logic, the less sense she could make of it. Ways to admit that the true nature of the connection made between her world and the one of *Undertale* was nothing short of a mind-screwing, reality-breaking.

“H-hey, uh...” she tried, eager to obtain her answer, but worried to disturb him in his probably important manipulations on the machine. “Do you think you could explain how you’re going to do it? Preferably in English?”

The last detail to her request made him chuckle since he guessed that she had obviously meant to a result of all the previous times when Alphys or him tried to bring complex concepts down to her understanding, but found themselves unable without bringing in the technical vocabulary that went along with it in the process.

Which is why, naturally, he expanded his grin and his skull in the most trollesque way he could afford.

“I’ve been able to use interdimensional transmission from your plane of existence to track down the game’s activities through each variation and quantum entanglement, so I’m gonna do the same thing I did when I brought you here, that’s to say track down the game’s signals to locate your home’s coordinates and settle a
locate your home’s coordinates and set he up enough connection so we can communicate little while. child’s play.”

The only answer he obtained was a non-amused The human teenager blinked. “Oh.” That... did simple enough. Kinda-sorta?

Hacking the Wi-Fi, huh. She guessed that since was linked to Steam and that if there were independent virtual Matrix-y stuff going on, it was natural to the Sans would be able to access her world’s internet one way or another... And since Alphys had mentioned they had seen the fandom stuff at some point, probably how. Maybe, even, this was more or less he had learned about the game’s existence somehow. Sans was about to push one last button, but he Taking a stiff breath, he turned around and sent them a nervous look.

“just, before we start anythin crazy.” he muttered. “d’you mind if we set some basic ground rules? She raised her sword, unsure in answering. “Sure? I
She raised her eyebrows in surprise. "Sure? I guess she blabbered, puzzled. "What kind of rules, then?"

"Well... for starters, I’ll *really* appreciate it if you don’t tell too many people ‘bout what happened. The teenager’s expression fell into a deeply grave and offended one, but before she could open her mouth and express her indignation, he quickly said, "I-it’s ok if you need to tell your family. But ask you to lie to them. it’s just... it’d really be better if the word didn’t get out too much. We’re, y’know. real."

"But *why*? If anything, if the other players knew what’s going on, it’ll only make them think they should leave the game alone, right? Wouldn’t that make things easier for you?"

The way the skeleton’s supposedly stuck smile had scrunched up in an apprehensive way was supposed to be talkative enough on its own. Yet, from the moment he had willingly kidnapped one of said players for the sake of his plan, shouldn’t he have expected that to be a risk he was bound to eventually break the game’s foreshadowing for *everyone else*? She had believed that after spending so much effort explaining *her* everything, he would have naturally willing to let everyone else in the loop...
He sighed tensely.

“‘k. let’s imagine we let everyone know and believe us. sure, they’re prolly gonna do something ‘bout the game.” he muttered somewhat reluctantly.

“But then what?”

“What do you mean, ‘then what’?” she shrugged in confusion. “You’ll have saved the world, that’s what’s happen when they know?”

Seeing his extremely serious and fidgety expression, the teenager decided to actually take some time to seek advice and think more deeply.

What could happen if her entire planet learned Undertale actually controlled a somewhat virtual world in which the “characters” were actually sentient? The fandom and the media would go crazy, that much was for sure. The game would attract even more attention than it already did, although for different reasons. She needed to keep enough faith in humanity to believe that the world would be kept safe from unfortunate fates like experimenting how it could be possible to create a functional world and do ethically questionable things. She was recreating the AI systems or something, but she...
Recreating the AI systems of something, but she did not blame anyone for keeping in mind such possibilities. Yeah; the more she thought about it, the more she imagined what kind of consequences there could be if the game could bend their world to the players’ will this happened without anyone being aware of it became aware of the full potential of the game’s power.

Once more, Dawn wanted to maintain enough humanity to safely believe that neither Toby Fox’s team nor a vast majority of the fandom (if not all) would ever let something like this happen; but she did not blame Sans for distrusting the ones who had been responsible for all his suffering for so long? Definitely.

Sans was fidgeting. The poor guy...

“look, it’s just… i really don’t know THAT much about the physics of your universe, i just saw enough to know that your souls are stored in that big black box he rambled uneasily. “but when it comes to dimensional travel, the thing is— it’s WAY more than it sounds. i mean, i’ve been able to build a functional portal machine just out of the materials available in the underground, while you have entire planet at your disposal.”
Wait, so was he implying that this machine or closer to ‘actual science’ than to science-fiction her side of humanity...? Was he implying that if knowledge of his machine went out, scientist about anyone from her original universe could eat their own? Wow. That was... certainly an unexpected...

“if something goes wrong in your world... as i know, there’s no reset option there. i just... don’t wanna mess up anything.” he quickly averting his glowing pupils and letting them wander.

While she had imagined that Players taking advantage of the game’s interface to rule this world was bad, arguably the idea of more and more humans cont her world to this one and exploring the Underground whatever reasons could be even worse. At least she reminded herself of how things had gone ru through her world’s History when simply different of humans were involved, and that in some par world this still was a reality... Yeah. Between the fans who would probably become invasive tourist the other kinds of people who would have some interests in visiting and/or researching the place.

“so... i hope i’m just being paranoid, but if too
people get to know for sure what’s going on, i’m scared of what could happen. maybe it lead to some great things, and we’d get to help or stay in contact; but even if things work i’m not the only one you got to learn a lot. i shouldn’t be the one to make any decision this. since that many people already know much about everyone… it’s not something depends on just me, y’know?”

Definitely. Just thinking again about the ‘tourism’ was enough to imagine that even if the fandos most probably make sure that they get the happy they deserve and have comfortable lives… it was more than a poisoned gift in some way, since no monster would be free from the celebrity exp…

One thing she was certain about was that a lot of could in fact suffer from this spotlight, like Napst the Whimsuns just to name a few (she would have Alphys if she didn’t look so fine about making related jokes with her… but still, there probably of differences between bonding with one random and being immersed in attention by all of them all. And she wasn’t even getting started with all the controversies that could be born out of this, monsterkind and humanity in both her world and
But in the end... Dawn realized that even beyond the fear of bad things happening, Sans’s fear was based on something different. Sans’s fear was not specifically due to his distrust of the Players. It was a fear of the unknown. Because if her world knew the truth, they would end up in completely uncharted territory with no means to ever go back. Dawn wondered if, after spending so much time in the Resets and getting used to knowing how everything occurred by heart... could it be that going back to a life in which he would be unable to predict the future would become a source of anxiety by itself? If only it were where the consequences would be so important and irrevocable, she could easily understand his unease.

But maybe, after being stuck for so long... he had found some sort of comfort in knowing every outcome. If this was the case, he certainly needed to settle the normal uncertainty as smoothly and gently as possible. Starting the uncertainty path with a life-changing, breaking choice that involved multiple worlds and billions of his entire civilization not being a smooth start, no understatement of the century.

Seeing that his interlocutor was intensely list listening perfectly silent, the monster eventually felt the need to break the awkward silence with yet another statement.
the awkward silence with yet another statement. Even obvious as it may be:

“so, maybe that wouldn’t be too bad, but...”

Sans mindlessly cringed upon hearing his name. “Uh, I don’t know what the real number is, but I’m pretty sure you’ll need a few more zeroes than that.”

She bit her lip guiltily, instantly realizing her accidental yet harsh lack of sensitivity. “R-right...”

Way to go, dumbass! Just add even more pressure to the situation.

So. This had to stay as much of a secret as it is.

Which meant that if she indeed intended to tell him the truth, she also had to find a way to convince him to keep the secret as well. Well, how much _fun_ would it have been if it were going to be so easy as to just make a call and say the magic words “Hi Mom, sorry the give you a heads up yesterday, it’s just that I got kidnap by a videogame character because he’s trying to save universe from time loops and he needs me to stay for a little while, but don’t worry, I’m just staying in an apocalyptic underground cavern populated by creatures that will want to kill me on sight if they find out because they think humans are relentless killers. Also, a compassion or something, oh and also I may or may...”
compulsion or something, oh and also I may or not be stuck as a virtual avatar of myself trapped in my or something, I have no idea how this thing actually and expect things to miraculously work out by the Given how smoothly things had gone with Grillby an hour earlier...

“Look. No matter what happens, I promise that everything to make sure the secret doesn’t get the open.” She tried to sound confident, probably a way to convince herself as well that she knew she was doing. “I’ll ease them into the situation.

She needed to tell her family the truth, but the make sure that said truth would still remain secret for everyone else. That seemed complicated... but that was doable. They just needed a plan. A fool-

“... Well, actually I have no idea how to do she shamefacedly admitted after a full body of silent, but regrettably unsuccessful school. “I guess I’ll just try to contact Lys and tell her that Sans’s expression showed that he seemed to this name, but was confused nonetheless. “ly?

“She’s the one who made me play in the first the human immediately explained. “So, she knows most of the story, and she’s the only
close to my family who’s deep enough into Underside to listen to us without too much trouble. Hopeful.

The skeleton hummed, then made a slow, hesitant sound. “Albeit not convinced, he seemed at least willing her judgement.

“i guess it means that the rest of your family doesn’t know about the game...?”

She sighed loudly and tensely, shrugging in utter frustration. “They know that it exists, but that’s it. I’m not sure my parents would remember its name.”

Which meant that if they wanted to tell them everything, they would have to explain his world’s full concepts of laws and physics first, before explaining why they kidnapped their beloved daughter without warning.

“As for my brother...” she muttered absent-mindedly while continuing her reasoning. “He’s a complete wildcard. That’s why Lys is the safer choice. If we get Lys, we win.”

Sans hummed again, processing the added checks now on the board and following her strategy. Paul was still wary about the idea of contacting a friend other than family, but since Dawn had mentioned that friend who had been responsible for pulling him into the situation in the first place... Dawn wanted to imp...
in order to let her know what happened, but there be two various motives behind it. But in the end,

"... i won't mind if you wanna tell her too. probably right, and even if you're not... i get."

He released a heavy breath. "and... if she's convincing— i'll help. or, uh, try to help."

Dawn raised a pair of surprised eyebrows at that soft smile she pulled right after that showed her and the relief of seeing he trusted her.

Still... His expression soon became that of one feeling like a skeleton who had seen things in his life and was nothing but freedom and calm, and whose actions very near future could either offer a brighter day or undo all his work by tainting his Happy Ending perhaps. His look of desperate hope hurt in so many ways.

"are you sure this is going to work?"

As much as he trusted her, he very obviously felt he couldn’t trust her family and friends to keep this. And knowing her parents... She had the same feelings. She could very well imagine her mother starting a panic attack and blabbering some nonsense to the police without letting them explain the full story. What the police would believe her or not was beside the point because if this happened, then the outcome always would
because if this happened then they probably wouldn’t have made a bad situation worse.

“It’ll work for Lys. I’m sure of it.” Dawn answered confidently but in an almost monotone voice. She had mentally repeated it in her head many times and only now dared utter this mantra for the first time. “The hard part’s gonna be explaining it to our parents... There’s no way they’ll handle everything together. But if we have Lys, she’ll be a huge help.”

The more she thought about it, the more confidence she felt. She trusted her friends; but Sans’s reaction... The fact that he was more and more trying to distance himself from her only raised her remaining doubts.

“Sans...” she called uneasily. “If it’s too dangerous, we can always abort the mission and tell them, we can always abort the mission and... and... and... you know. You don’t have to risk everything just for us.”

“No... it’s fine. I’m sure we won’t get exposed and after talkin’ with Grillbs earlier, it’s probably best to think some things over.” he admitted carefully, weighing his words. “They’re your parents, and all, and you’ll be here for a while, so you deserve to know what happened, too.”

Dawn’s silent but meaningful nod was all he needed to satisfy the depth of her motivations, and to understand the worry she was herself. Surely not having someone...
worried she was herself. Surely not having any in her home was hurting her to the same extent, family’s lack of information was hurting them.

Hearing his answer, her eyes flashed with a determination, but some remaining doubts made nonetheless. They were about to do it, that much certain and unavoidable. But when it came to were going to do it... This was where they could either endorse the situation or condemn it entirely. It had been enough to tell one monster, who knew Sans personally, had seen firsthand what was at stake. Now, telling from a world in which magic did not exist and who even know what the video game was about, without getting them to freak out and call the immediately...? Talk about a lost cause. How glad that she had Lys to convince first.

Sans took a deep breath... Then, after sending him a look and exchanging one last tense nod, he turned his machine and flipped the last switch. Immediately, the unholy mixture of whirs and roaring hums were; the huge generator started trembling and the entire vibrated menacingly; but after a few dozen, thankfully, it all calmed down and the noise was reduced to a mix of somewhat soothing background. And then, it began. Feeling her phone vibrate
pocket, Dawn pulled it out and watched the second notification popped up; then a second; then a door 

"... looks like they've been busy." the monster woke up in half-surprise.

"More than half of them are PMs." she stated as she browsed her messages. "And they're still coming..."

While he had certainly predicted that some of her admirers would have naturally sent her random messages, he was out of range about whatever daily activities she was going through in her normal life, the amount of the something he had not seen coming. And seeing her face when she read the newest ones... Whoever sent these messages definitely wasn't talking about the weather.

When she raised her head and finally separated from the screen to look at him, her face had lost many shades of pink.

"... They already called the police."

One sentence. Just one sentence.

She immediately went back to her phone, let her fingers run on its surface, click, brush, dance the buttons and the miniature keyboard that so appeared. Soon the screen changed to show a simple and a dorky image, along with an audible rington
Sans first feared her panic could have caused her to do something reckless, but when he read that the answer to the question was “Lys the Nerd BFF 🌸”, he felt slightly reassured that, even through said panic, she was still sticking to the plan.

“Come on, come on…”

They both stared at the screen anxiously for a few seconds, but eventually, the call ended on its own, offering the options to try again or give up. When the sidebar at the top of the screen a closer look, it seemed to hit her:

“… It’s ten thirty. We’re on Monday. She’s at school.”

She face-palmed and grumbled. “Of course.”

“guess that can’t be helped…” Sans sighed him.

“so, what now?”

“She’s gonna have a break soon, but it probably won’t last long enough and she’ll be in a rush,” she reasoned out loud. “I guess it’s best to wait for lunch break…”

Just as she was saying these last two words, she frowned and crumpled her face in confusion, the time shown on her phone.

“… We just had lunch break.”
“looks like there might be some time difference or somethin.” the skeleton shrugged. “i guess we’d’ve been a pretty big coincidence if it happened to be the same time in both our worlds.”

She hummed, considering the implications of that, and realizing that it explained a few tiny weird feelings she had had on the previous day without giving them more thought.

However, she could not delve too much into the details as, once more, her phone started vibrating again, much more fiercely. Someone was trying to call her, and as soon as she saw the name, she bit her lip uneasily, raised her eyes towards Sans, answering his silent question.

“It’s my brother.”

“... does he know the game?” Sans asked nervously.

Dawn’s thumb was shaking, but after one second of hesitation it brushed the screen and rejected the call. “I told you. He’s the wild card, he knows about it, but I have no idea how he’ll react. anything.” She sent him another look, this time with more confidence: “I think we should really see Lys... It’ll only take two hours at most. I can send a PM in the meantime so she’ll call ASAP.”

The tension in his bones seemed to vanish a
The tension in his bones seemed to vanish and he nodded. “sounds good.”

The human went back to brushing her phone’s various rapid motions, waltzing between apps and words in seconds. She tried to go for a simple message, but it also needed to be one that wouldn’t trigger too many questions — just enough questions to have Lys give her a call as soon as she would realize she just needed to type, press some virtual buttons, ... And the keyboard button she was about to change from a regular space bar to an “Ans green button a split second before her thumb pressed. Charlie had just tried to call her again right in the middle of her typing. The universe really hated them on that front. Before either of them could process what had happened, a blurry human face appeared on the screen. The quality of the video was terrible, but it was enough to show for certain that the guy was not going to hurt her.

“Oh hey there, Dawn. Fancy seeing you Wherever you are.” It was strange to conceive the sarcasm in his voice seemed both exhausted and done, and yet spicy and alert all at the same time. “Looks like you got one hell of a crappy Wi-Fi Where you at, Montana or something?” “Uuuuuuuuuuh...” Dawn tried to send a direct message.
worried glance at Sans, only to realize that he had already disappeared from the spot next to her. He had already teleported to the other end of the room.

He was staring at her with a look of stunned confusion, but at least the surprise hadn’t stopped him from acting quickly. He sure had sharp reflexes.

“So, are you gonna explain what exactly you’ve been doing?” the human quickly added, not waiting for her sister to answer anything to his previous rhetorical questions. “Or judging by your face, you probably intended to just keep ignoring me forever. Most fitting since you didn’t tell us anything about vanishing like you did.”

“Well, it’s complicated but... I can—”

She had intended that question more towards the monster in front of her than towards the one she was supposed be talking to. In response, the monster seemed to distort his skull in some sort of unspeakable grimace, but eventually he tried to look somewhat supportive and shrugged, sending his arms dramatically in the process to emphasize his point.

“Like hell you’re gonna explain, missy.” he replied with bitter haste. “What were you thinking? Did you just leave for some reason?”
Something in Dawn’s chest sank painfully.

“Wait. You... you think I ran away?”

“What else did you want us to think!? The video quality had a resolution just high enough to that he had rolled his eyes in absolute exasperation. “You disappear from your room! Nobody saw you going through the front door! You don’t do anything! Just so you know, Mom didn’t sleep last night, and she’s not the only one.”

Dawn flinched. Sans silently sent her a question compassionately worried look, as if to ask her if he always sounded this aggressive while addressing her. The guilt in her eyes seemed to be that of someone not used to this kind of situation, so he assumed it was not. On one hand, it was a relief that she go through this sort of situation often; on the other hand, it emphasized the gravity of the present.

She bit her bottom lip in guilt and concern, shifting in her chair. “... How many cups of coffee did you take today?”

“Oh so you really want to know, huh?” he said.

“Ha. Here I thought you wouldn’t care about we’d feel after you vanished without a trace. if you’d left at least a note or something, we’
If you’d left at least a note or something, we’d have some clues to start investigating from.”

The tired bags in his eyes squinted slowly, as the man reconsidered his last sentence and seemed to realize that maybe leaving clues wouldn’t have been the best thing to do if her goal was to not be found and to avoid being incredibly dumb of him to suggest she should have trusted his judgment of consciously jeopardizing her own escape plan. He needed more coffee.

“... My point is.” he sighed tiredly. “We’re going to find you anyway. If you tell us where you are and what you’re doing and bring you home, we’ll just have a talk and then we’ll ask you some questions. I don’t know, are we not a good family or something? Is that the problem?”

Dawn’s expression literally melted into a crumpled mass of guilt and pain, with a pair of two chocolate eyes half-covered by themselves in the void. In a last-ditch effort to find support or sort of guidance, these eyes went wandering into a pair of pupils that sockets standing almost ten feet away.

She had hurt her family so deeply; they were just as hurt as her, and not only were they hurt, they were angry. How could they have known that the reason behind her disappearance was of (somewhat) supernatural origin? Of course they would have assumed that, with the obvious exterior reason for her to leave, the only
left could only have come from inside the family. Were they feeling guilty of whatever they thought they could have done to hurt her in the past? But then what was all of it about at all! She loved her family, her life... She had literally no reason to leave. She had never wanted to leave them in the first place. She had never wanted to be kidnapped. She had asked anyone anything. Those two pitch black slits were losing her eyes into had never asked for her before taking her here. Did Sans ever consider her when he promised that she would go back to be safe and sound? Putting her family through such an torture was neither safe nor sound!

If her ‘real world’ body had actually disappeared to what she had previously expected, if time passing so differently in both worlds, then a literally stealing part of her life away, not only but from everybody she knew as well. Maybe he intended it that way, or maybe he thought that the of saving his world were worth inducing that pain but now, as her mind was racing and turning around new elements she had gathered, she herself was sense of certainty over everything she thought she

What was happening? She had no idea. All her theories seemed to be now disproved with every
was occurring in this instant. Yet when she was looking at the skeleton’s eyes, although he was tense, he didn’t seem nearly as lost as she was. After all, he was the one who brought her here, and he was the one who knew how all his experiments had worked and how his plan was supposed to go. Was there something obviously missing ever since the beginning? ... Was Sans consciously hiding something from her?

“Dawn, I’m trying to talk to you right now!”

Hearing her name brutally snapped her out of her daze. She looked back at her phone’s screen, and he was staring gravely. She apologized in a small voice, spacing out, but he brushed off her words and reacted:

“There’s someone with you. Isn’t there.”

The distraught distress running in her eyes took a dark color from her face. Had she seriously busted Sans looking at him? She found herself shaking uncontrollably:

“C-Charlie, it’s...”

“How many people? Are you running away together? Are they hippies!? Dawn I don’t know what you’ve crammed into your head but you HAVE to-”

“I’m sorry!” she exploded in panic. “I really can’t come home right now, but I promise I’ll be back! I—"
I don’t know when, but... L-look. Please. I’m in danger. That’s all I want you to know. I know I’m all worried about me, and I’m sorry I can’t come but—I-it’s just maybe a question of a few weeks, I think...? M-maybe I just need a time-

“Is that what you want us to tell your school, you need a fucking TIME-OUT!?” he scowled. “do you have any idea how much trouble you right now? Just wait ‘till Mom hears about this gonna FLIP.”

”Cause you really think I came here by child, she huffed in disbelief. “I didn’t realize you knew that little.” Admittedly, that last one hurt to say.

“How else did you expect us to interpret it? Or tell me why you’re the one who answered phone?” he asked rhetorically. “If you’re in that you were kidnapped or something, I don’t you’d be able to talk to me right now, Dawn.”

Despite Dawn’s attempts at explaining the situation last sentence effectively put her at a loss of words seconds, as she could not figure out where to start begin to explain that one rationally. Of course stop explanation with “I was kidnapped” was not going sense unless this specific argument could be just
and she could not justify this argument first without her brother beforehand that she had been and contact her family in order to explain what was because even though she was not in danger she would be able to go back to her home before her he be done saving his universe, and she explain that before explaining first why the needed saving in the first place, and she could no that without first telling him that she had been killed because her presence was needed for the universe saved, and she could not explain that without first that she had been kidnapped.

This last sentence was a very convoluted way to no matter where she intended to start her expl she would first need to have another part of the explained first, in such way that there was eff way to properly start the explanation at all.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought.” Charlie spoke certain that the teenager’s silence was the proof he needed to ensure that he was “If you wanted us to think that you were kid so you could cover up whatever it is you’re doing, you should’ve tried harder than that.” Whatever it was that Dawn answered to this a.
Sans had stopped listening. There could be a lot of reasons why this scene was painful to watch for anyone, whether their relationship was broken or not, or whether hurtful words would reach your compassion even if you did not feel involved in the argument, or whether it was the bickering that was slowly tearing siblings apart, annoying you; it was very likely that multiple reasons from both categories were stacking up in his mind, giving this strange sensation he could feel weighing on his soul. Either way, the skeleton eventually found himself forced to watch these two siblings being desperately and frantically trying to strangle each other’s throats, as the volume of their frustrated voices kept rising.

“okay, now that’s enough.”

Before they knew it, Sans was right by Dawn’s side, already snatched the phone away from her. Admittedly, at this exact moment when the monster faced himself facing the screen, he froze for a short moment. He wondered if he had momentarily forgotten what he had done or as if he just realized that he had acted out of impulsiveness without having any plan in mind. But, quickly enough, this feeling disappeared. After all, the plan had always been to tell that guy the truth. If anything, needed to deviate slightly from that original plan.
explain everything instead of Dawn would make it easier to believe.

Speaking of Dawn, she was now stuck staring at her gaping jaw and a pair of round shocked eyes.

“Heya.” he soon saluted the screen, casual and composed. How he could look so relaxed in such a moment simply beyond her. “So. you’re her big brother, nice meetin ya. you prolly wouldn’t care, but that big bro, too. so i guess that makes one thing i have in common.”

On the screen, the pixelated, low-res picture of Sans squinted his eyes as he approached his face to the screen and seemingly attempted to better discern what was going on.

“... Who the fuck is that clown?”

... Looking at the bright side, this was a much better reaction than one of overt panic with loud screams unstillable and pointless running around. On the other hand, though, the young man’s expression was more surprised than he had expected.

When Sans sent a quick glance at Dawn’s expression, it seemed just as surprised as him, if not more, brother wouldn’t show any more shock than this. Two options were laid out in front of them. Either
had seen things, or, the most likely option: he simply did not fully grasped the truth behind what he was led to believe for a variety of possible reasons.

Reminiscing how events had transpired earlier, she decided to go with the same strategy Sans had employed: Grillby:


She remembered too little too late that Sans’s strategy had failed miserably the last time and felt compelled to see her palm and celebrate her own sheer stupidity. In the end, she did not, but it was very tempting.

Charlie did not move an inch. The only traits that shifted on his face slowly displayed one single question that needed not to be uttered to maintain the suspense. This expression was nothing more than the blandness of the perfect mixture between condescension, sarcasm and absolute skepticism. In one word: “Oh.”

“So. How can I put it. Um.” Dawn pursed her lips awkwardly. She took a short but deep breath, preparing her answer; and then:

“You ran away with a cosplayer guy.” Her blood was deduced bluntly.

Her shoulders deflated like a leaking balloon, stu
effect put aside.

“Oh, come on. Don’t tell me you can’t see! This time, she fully succumbed to the call of legendary face-palm, and felt absolutely no need for it. “Dude, he’s literally right in front of you, on and everything.”

“Yeah, I see pixels of very low quality and a ding with a questionably less bad quality. So what? Dawn could hardly believe it. How could he be so... Then again... She quickly remembered how herself had been the first time she met Sans — and even met him face to face. Well, while they were in complete darkness, so she had an excuse. Was this guy’s excuse now? The bad quality of the...

... Judging from how blurry his own face appeared on her screen, admittedly, she could easily imagine even from up close, the image of a monster that an anatomy so close to a human’s could be mistaken for an actual human, thus fueling her already skeptical rational doubts. Oh how the tables had turned.

“Looks like it runs in the family.” Sans winked with a grin, unable to repress the temptation to openly reminisce.
“Shut up.”

Under lighter circumstances, the dorkiness of her glare would have only made him patronize her further. But the situation was serious, and dangerously so. Luckily for him, it appeared that Dawn was taking it even more seriously than he did, and the cogs of her mind were turning and fuming at high speed right now. Obviously, as things were so far, they were going to make the image less blurry, Charlie was likely to see every single detail of their surroundings and themselves in the glory of all the unearthly beings that would be a first step; small, but unavoidable. Well, there goes that idea. Just great. Dawn wondered for a moment if she could actually show off some of his actual magic in order to make this situation better, but she quickly shuddered and shook this idea away. Either the shock would be too great, she would actually get her brother to freak out and completely out of control, or, gracious thank heaven, phone’s lack of reception and the video call’s
No matter how she was looking at it, she had no choice but to put some sense into him. Not from a distance. Not from such limited resources.

When once more, her brother asked her what they were doing and warned her that they were going to disappear sooner or later, she couldn’t filter her thoughts, and only a flood of exasperated yet desperate truth escaped her mouth.

“Please, you have to listen... I-I don’t know how to tell you, but even if you’re looking for me, I... I’m sure you won’t be able to find us that way.”

“i confirm.” Sans nodded solemnly. “if you persist on searchin’ around, you’ll never find us.”

“What, so you’re saying that you left the country without something? You’re still in America at least, right?”

This made Dawn stop for a few seconds, as she took time to consider her options.

“I... honestly have no idea where we are, tech speaking.” she suddenly realized.

Did they land on Earth, in the United States, or...?
Did the Undertale Earth look the same as hers? Surface’s countries and continents even the same? different was this world’s human History from hers.

And to push things even further, if she added that “world” problem in the equation... Did anyone even try to program the Surface’s landscapes at all, besides the parts shown in the True Pacifist Route’s end credits? Sans said he remembered the Surface, but... What was it like? If it wasn’t part of the game’s used... what use would there have been for anyone to make additional maps at all? Was there something in she was missing here...?

“i heard mount ebott’s somewhere in californ i remember correctly... don’t take my word for though.” Sans immediately answered without much thought. Then he quickly turned his back towards Charlie and added: “either way. don’t search your california. won’t work.”

That last sentence only took a guttural huff from the human it was directed to.

“Seriously. You’re really all taking us for idiots, you? Who do you even think you are with that costume, “Skeletonymous” or something?”
actually lost focus and scrunched up his expression into that of a man who so desperately needed sleep that he was struggling to think straight, let alone was absolutely determined to obtain his answers.

“Unless it’s ‘Sansynmous’? Sans-onymous? Sans-a-what?”

... Nah, that sounds dumb. I need coffee.”

Oh stars what a dork. Somebody just give him a pillow please. And for the love of everything keep away from that percolator at all costs.

“what the heck is he talkin’ about?” Cue cue Sans noises, of course. Poor innocent man preserved from human culture and all that.

Dawn sighed. “Please don’t ask.”

“at least he knows about undertale, after all he whispered, hopefully quietly enough so Charlie couldn’t hear.

“Only the cringe part.” she deadpanned. “You leave before he says something you’re gonna make me laugh.”

The skeleton visibly hesitated with great reluctance. Thankfully he eventually gave a small resigned nod to the screen, then the room. Maybe he would even go out of the house, who knows.

Anyway. Turning back towards her phone and then to the screen. She could understand what their children had...
of his brother, she took a deep, but unamused breath. She was, very and simply, done.

“Look, Charlie. You want the truth? I’m gonna tell you the truth. Wait right there. Just stop me. And *put that down.*” she hurriedly added, pointing accusingly at the gigantic coffee mug he was bringing closer and closer to his mouth. “You’re gonna need some real rest after this.”

Without giving it more thought, she stomped her heels in the middle of the basement. The only question was, did she plan? Well, not really. But by this point, did it even matter?

As soon as she arrived in the living room, she saw her familiar yellow lizard sitting on the couch, ironically looking at her own cup of coffee in peace. Since her entrance was not of the discreet kind, Dawn’s entrance was immediately revealed, and although she was silent due to her mouth being probably full, the curiosity was made obvious thanks to the spark in her eyes.

Perfect. She had her attention. The teenager turned to her friend a bright smile full of hope. “Oh hey. Maybe you could help me, I’ve been trying to tell the dork of a bro where *exactly* I am.”

It all happened in an instant. The coffee mug went through the ceiling and then finished its parabolic trajectory. It hit the floor, the spit take was instantaneous. Following...
floor, the spit-take was instantaneously followed by a shriek that sounded exactly like the squeaking of a rolling pin, and Dawn discovered that Alphys was able to jump like a kangaroo and excuse herself by reaching the kitchen door before the couch in a single jump.

Oh, and, the kitchen door was slammed shut, of course. Just in case that detail was not obvious enough. What a perfect conclusion of this daring escape.

Abscond she wanted, and abscond she did. She had no other option, that ancient art taught by the instincts of survival.

All in all: colloquially speaking, Alphys had merely simply noped out of the situation.

... Thank you for reminding me that you can’t count on your friends when you need them, Alphys.

As soon as the kitchen door slammed shut, a cocktail of hysteriac yelps started, composed of sentences of the caliber as “Are you OUT OF YOUR MIND?”, “You couldn’t even let me know before that in my back?”, the latter of which was immediately countered with “the same way you could’ve given heads up ’bout the snowdin town residents coming.”

The two monsters seemed too invested in their world to realize that the kitchen door was not an isolating enough to fully muffle their respective scolding.

“What just happened?” the older brother asked,
what just happened?” the elder brother annoyed and uninterested but nonetheless co-
“I couldn’t see anything. It sounded like you someone a heart attack or something.”
“... Never mind.” she grumbled between her
“I’ll just find something else.”

If she could not find help from inside...

Well, going out was out of the question, obviously she really need to get out at all?
She approached the main windows of the living room, the side and carefully took a sneak peek out
were far, but monsters were visible.

“I don’t know what you’re trying to do, but that gonna work.” her brother cynically commented.

She completely glued her phone’s screen to the
And then she waited.
This had to work. Please work. Please please please
be a complete idiot.

“So what is this, a convention? A metal coasters
A hippie cult thingy?”

“Dude, what do you think this is, the seven
Just get real already! This is all real, I swear!”
“I AM getting real, you need to get real!”
Okay, now this is just getting sad. Sad and boring.

“I told you already, I can’t see shit with what kind of crappy reception you got.” As annoyed as he was, at least the big brother had decency to at least try to help her make her case, pointing out the current flaws in her plan. “If you want to show me anything, you’re gonna need to make it clear.”

It didn’t mean that his friendly advice could be helpful, though. “Well I’d love to, trust me, but I’m not going to be tough. If I get out, I’m dead.”

“Metaphorically.”

“Literally.”

She heard the repeated sounds of fingers snatching at a keyboard. She face-palmed.

“What are you doing?”

“Googling the convention panels of the night. There can’t be too many locations to check out, trust me, we ARE going to find you, Dawn.”

Darn. It really does run in the family!

The teenager pulled her phone back to her face and could both see her brother and give him the mother of all可供的 threats.
glare she could afford to give.

“Charlie, I’m serious! Just drop it already!”

“Or what?” he huffed annoyingly. “Your cos friend’s gonna give me a ‘bad time’ or something.”

She gasped. Oh no he didn’t.

... Okay, things are getting way too out of hand. Fun as it could be to see Sans’s reaction to these, there’s a limit to everything. This was a bad idea since the start.

“... I will let you know that you are very lucky him to leave because you have no idea how you wouldn’t have wanted to say that to his she muttered slowly and with a mixture be fear and freezing coldness. “Look I know I’m sound crazy when I say this, but you need to what you see and...”

Dawn froze. Eyes wide open, staring with horror mixture between shock and fascination, mouth breathless. If the quality of the video weren’t Charlie could have seen with more clarity and that her blood soon drained from her face as she pale like the snow he had vaguely seen outside.

Then, her lips trembling as much as her cracking
voice, she uttered actual words:

“I-I need to go.”

His response was as immediate as futile:

“What? Oh no, you’re not going anywhere. I’m gonna tell me where you are right now, and I’m gonna pick you up—wait, Dawn, are you listening to me right now?! Dawn, don’t you dare hang up on me!”

She hung up.
Her legs threatened to let her fall when she dared to look back at the phone. It was all glued her back to the wall right next to the largest window. Did she really see what she thought she had seen? Her small dozen of seconds of staring swore the testimony was correct. But even now, she couldn’t believe it. There was no way. How could he be here?

Still attempting to convince herself that the fog of insanity had fooled her, she poked her nose and sneaky eyes at her hiding place as little as possible, just enough to be able to take another look outside.

Sans’s house was, as displayed in the game, situated in the furthest outskirts of Snowdin Town; even more than she had first thought. Instead of being close to other houses and just being coincidentally at the bottom of a hill, this house was definitely standing at a distance from the town.
of the town.

This was what had allowed Sans’s and Grillby’s critic to be left vastly unnoticed by the faraway bystanders. And this was what, in this exact moment, allowed the critic to witness this giant silhouette walking slowly town to town, gliding silently among the dense fog, mysteriously raised during the last few minutes, quickly surrounded the area.

It was alone. It was silent. It was tall; hung over, as the density of the fog and the harshness of the cold advancing with a certain presence; a regal presence. That was all she needed to know.

She barged in the kitchen at high speed. The two stopped their arguing to stare in shock. She was Alphys may have mistakenly interpreted the expression for a sign of anger or betrayal toward their previous act of bailing, judging by her nervous words:

“L-listen Dawn, I-I’m sorry for freeing you out earlier, but you need to understand that contacting your family and telling them everything is—”

“No time!” the teenager blurted out in panic. I s-saw Asgore. J-just outside.”

Dead silence. Sans froze in place, while the lizard
Dead silence. Sans froze in place, while the liza trembled like a golden leaf in autumn. Alphys was the first to recover enough from the shock to regain her ability to use her voice.

“Th-that d-doesn’t make a-a-any sense. W-what would he be doing here? U-unless... you friend...” She was looking at Sans. Not asking a question.

“You think Grillby snitched on us!?”

“Grillby? impossible. can’t think about it.” The skeleton was shaking his skull frantically, filled with what only appeared to be traces of obvious, painful denial. “dawn. are you sure it was him.

“Ten feet tall goat guy with a cape and a tribe. She was panting and stuck on the very edge of hyperventilation. “Yeah. Pretty sure.”

He had brought his signature weapon along with him. Whatever reason he had come for, he meant business. Definitely human business.

The more she wanted to reminisce her mental image, the more she convinced herself that it was a mistake, the more she became. She had never heard of any other monster alive who could follow that description.

Sans’s phone buzzed. In a second it was open in front of him and displaying a single message:
Dawn was not exactly sure what to think, when Sans had so bluntly yet casually mentioned that at any moment, if he had so wished, he could have allowed her to talk to whoever she wanted from her original world.

Of course, the first emotion she had felt was unexpected joy, and only when she felt that joy did she understand just how much she really missed her family and friends, even after just one day. But soon, this euphoric happiness faded to let her rational part fall like an anvil: because if, anytime, she really *could* have stayed in contact with them, but that *she had not* for the past twenty-and-something hours…

It meant two things. The first one was, her previous hope that time would function differently in the two universes was most certainly wrong. The second was, since time passed at a similar enough rate in both worlds so they would be able to have an intelligible conversation at all…

Everyone had been left without any news regarding her whereabouts for the past twenty-and-something hours.
Her parents had to be incredibly worried, and she had left everyone hanging on the server, waiting eternally for an *Undertale* livestream that would never take place. Yikes.

She had to let them know she was alright.

She followed Sans hurriedly, until they were back in the basement and facing that giant *Matrix*-whatever machine.

She watched the skeleton flip the switches hastily, as if he had just now realized that he might not have wanted her to get in trouble because of him kidnapping her for the Sake of Saving the World. For that, or for whatever other kind of motive he had for so suddenly changing his mind — depending on whether he had always had this fact in mind and wanted to keep it secret until then, or if he had simply forgotten about it and was somehow just reminded of it.

Dawn’s previous thoughts regarding her situation and how this machine of his worked rushed back in her head, as she watched him settle the sciencey-magicky parameters that needed to be settled before the connection between her real world and the current virtual one they were standing in could be restored. Yet, she found herself thinking that the more she was trying to rationalize its mechanisms and logic, the less sense she could make of it. Maybe she had to admit that the true nature of the connection the game made between her world and the one of *Undertale* was nothing short of a mind-screwing, reality-breaking mystery.

“H-hey, uh…” she tried, eager to obtain her answers but worried to disturb him in his probably super important manipulations on the machine. “Do you think you could explain how you’re going to do this? Preferably in English?”

The last detail to her request made him chuckle lightly, since he guessed that she had obviously meant to add it as a result of all the previous times when Alphys or him had tried to bring complex concepts down to her level of understanding, but found themselves unable to do so without bringing in the technical vocabulary that naturally went along with it in the process.

Which is why, naturally, he expanded his grin and turned his skull in the most trollesque way he could afford.

“i’ve been able to use interdimensional photon transmissions from your plane of existence to track down the game’s activities through entropy variations and quantum entanglement, so i’m just gonna do the same thing i did when i brought you here, that’s to say track down the game’s signal to locate your home’s coordinates and settle a stable enough connection so we can communicate for a little while. child’s play.”
The only answer he obtained was a non-amused glare.

This was the exact answer he had been expecting from her, but he still feigned disappointment and shrugged, sighing loudly as he shook his skull overdramatically.

“i’m gonna hack your wi-fi.” he casually rephrased.

The human teenager blinked. “Oh.” That… did sound simple enough. Kinda-sorta?

Hacking the Wi-Fi, huh. She guessed that since the game was linked to Steam and that if there were indeed some virtual Matrix-y stuff going on, it was natural to think that Sans would be able to access her world’s internet network one way or another… And since Alphys had mentioned that they had seen the fandom stuff at some point, this was probably how. Maybe, even, this was more or less the way he had learned about the game’s existence somehow…?

Sans was about to push one last button, but hesitated. Taking a stiff breath, he turned around and sent the human a nervous look.

“just, before we start anythin crazy.” he mumbled. “d’you mind if we set some basic ground rules?”


If anything, Sans looked extremely nervous.

“well… for starters, i’ll really appreciate it if you don’t tell too many people ‘bout what happened.” The teenager’s expression fell into a deeply scared and offended one, but before she could open her mouth and express her indignation, he quickly added: “i-it’s ok if you need to tell your family. i won’t ask you to lie to them. it’s just… it’d really be better if the word didn’t get out too much that we’re, y’know. real.”

“But why? If anything, if the other players get to know what’s going on, it’ll only make them realize they should leave the game alone, right? Wouldn’t that make things easier for you?”

The way the skeleton’s supposedly stuck smile somehow scrunched up in an apprehensive way was supposed to be talkative enough on its own. Yet, from the moment that he had willingly kidnapped one of said players for the sake of his plan, shouldn’t he have expected that to be a sign
that he was bound to eventually break the game’s fourth wall for everyone else? She had believed that after spending so much effort explaining her everything, he would have been naturally willing to let everyone else in the loop as well.

He sighed tensely.

“’k. let’s imagine we let everyone know and they believe us. sure, they’re prolly gonna do something ‘bout the game.” he muttered somewhat reluctantly. “but then what?”

“What do you mean, ‘then what’?” she shrugged in confusion. “You’ll have saved the world, that’s what.”

“yeah. sure. but then, what do you think’s gonna happen when they know?”

Seeing his extremely serious and fidgety expression, the teenager decided to actually take some time to follow his advice and think more deeply.

What could happen if her entire planet learned that Undertale actually controlled a somewhat virtual world in which the “characters” were actually sentient?

The fandom and the media would go crazy, that much was for sure. The game would attract even more attention than it already did, although for different reasons. She wanted to keep enough faith in humanity to believe that the game would be kept safe from unfortunate fates like scientists experimenting how it could be possible to create a fully functional world and do ethically questionable things like recreating the AI systems or something, but she couldn’t blame anyone for keeping in mind such possibility.

Yeah; the more she thought about it, the more she could imagine what kind of consequences there could be for Sans and everyone else. They were already vulnerable because the game could bend their world to the players’ will, and this happened without anyone being aware of anything; how much control could the players actually gain if they became aware of the full potential of the game’s power?

Once more, Dawn wanted to maintain enough faith in humanity to safely believe that neither Toby Fox and his team nor a vast majority of the fandom (if not all of it) would ever let something like this happen; but could she blame Sans for distrusting the ones who had been responsible for all his suffering for so long? Definitely not.
Sans was fidgeting. The poor guy…

“look, it’s just… i really don’t know THAT much about the physics of your universe, i just found out enough to know that your souls are stronger.” he rambled uneasily. “but when it comes to inter-dimensional travel, the thing is— it’s WAY easier than it sounds. i mean, i’ve been able to build a functional portal machine just out of the materials available in the underground, while you have your entire planet at your disposal.”

Wait, so was he implying that this machine of his was closer to ‘actual science’ than to science-fiction, even to her side of humanity…? Was he implying that if the mere knowledge of his machine went out, scientists or just about anyone from her original universe could easily build their own? Wow. That was… certainly an unexpected twist.

“if something goes wrong in your world… as far as i know, there’s no reset option there. i just… i just don’t wanna mess up anything.” he quickly added, averting his glowing pupils and letting them wander.

While she had imagined that Players taking advantage of the game’s interface to rule this world was bad enough, arguably the idea of more and more humans coming from her world to this one and exploring the Underground for whichever reasons could be even worse. At least, when she reminded herself of how things had gone repeatedly through her world’s History when simply different cultures of humans were involved, and that in some parts of her world this still was a reality… Yeah. Between the Undertale fans who would probably become invasive tourists, and all the other kinds of people who would have some various interests in visiting and/or researching the place… Yikes.

“so… i hope i’m just being paranoid, but if too many people get to know for sure what’s going on, then… i’m scared of what could happen. maybe it could lead to some great things, and we’d get to hang out or stay in contact; but even if things work out… i’m not the only one you got to learn a lot about. i shouldn’t be the one to make any decision about this. since that many people already know that much about everyone… it’s not something that depends on just me, y’know?”

Definitely. Just thinking again about the ‘tourism’ scenario was enough to imagine that even if the fandom would most probably make sure that they get the happy ending they deserve and have comfortable lives… it was nothing more than a poisoned gift in some way, since in return, no monster would be free from the celebrity exposure.

One thing she was certain about was that a lot of monsters could in fact suffer from this spotlight, like Napstablook or the Whimsuns just to name a few (she would have named Alphys if she didn’t look so fine about making fandom-related jokes with her… but still, there probably was a lot of differences between bonding with one random fangirl, and being immersed in attention by all of
them all at once).

And she wasn’t even getting started with all the possible controversies that could be born out of this, involving monsterkind and humanity in both her world and this one.

But in the end… Dawn realized that even beyond the mere fear of bad things happening, Sans’s fear was actually based on something different.

Sans’s fear was not *specifically* due to his distrust of the Players. It was a fear of the unknown. Because if they let her world know the truth, they would end up in completely uncharted territory with no means to ever go back.

Dawn wondered if, after spending so much time trapped in the Resets and getting used to knowing how every little thing occurred by heart… could it be that going back to a life in which he would be unable to predict the future had become a source of anxiety by itself? If only in the case where the consequences would be so important and irrevocable, she could easily understand his uneasiness.

But maybe, after being stuck for so long… he had started to find some sort of comfort in knowing every outcome? If this was the case, he certainly needed to settle back to the normal uncertainty as smoothly and gently as possible. Starting the uncertainty path with a life-changing, reality-breaking choice that involved multiple worlds and the fate of his entire civilization *not* being a smooth start was the understatement of the century.

Seeing that his interlocutor was intensely listening yet perfectly silent, the monster eventually felt the need to fill the awkward silence with yet another statement, as obvious as it may be:

“So, maybe that wouldn’t be too bad, but with a few thousand people already knowing all about us…”

Dawn mindlessly cringed upon hearing his words. “Uh, I don’t know what the real number is, but I’m pretty sure you’ll need a few more zeroes than that.”

Sans actually winced. “… not helping.”

She bit her lip guiltily, instantly realizing her words’ accidental yet harsh lack of sensitivity. “R-right. Sorry.”

Way to go, dumbass! Just add even more pressure.

So. This had to stay as much of a secret as it could be. Which meant that if she indeed intended to
tell her family the truth, she also had to find a way to convince them to keep the secret as well.
Well, how much fun would this have been if it were going to be so easy as to just give them a call
and say the magic words “Hi Mom, sorry that I didn’t give you a heads up yesterday, it’s just that I
got kidnapped by a videogame character because he’s trying to save his universe from time loops
and he needs me to stay with him for a little while, but don’t worry, I’m just staying in a post-
apocalyptic underground cavern populated by magical creatures that will want to kill me on sight
if they find me because they think humans are relentless killers with no compassion or something,
oh and also I may or may not be stuck as a virtual avatar of myself trapped in my computer or
something, I have no idea how this thing actually works” and expect things to miraculously work
out by themselves? Given how smoothly things had gone with Grillby less than an hour earlier…

“Look. No matter what happens, I promise that I’ll do everything to make sure the secret doesn’t
get out in the open.” She tried to sound confident, probably as a way to convince herself as well
that she knew what she was doing. “I’ll ease them into the situation and…”

She needed to tell her family the truth, but they had to make sure that said truth would still remain
secret enough for everyone else. That seemed complicated… but doable.

That was doable. They just needed a plan. A fool-proof one.

“… Well, actually I have no idea how to do this.” she shamefacedly admitted after a full minute of
silent, but regrettably unsuccessful scheming. “I guess I’ll just try to contact Lys and tell her first.”

Sans’s expression showed that he seemed to recall this name, but was confused nonetheless.
“lys…”

“She’s the one who made me play in the first place.” the human immediately explained. “So, she
already knows most of the story, and she’s the only person close to my family who’s deep enough
into Undertale to listen to us without too much trouble. Hopefully.”

The skeleton hummed, then made a slow, heavy nod. Albeit not convinced, he seemed at least
willing to trust her judgement.

“i guess it means that the rest of your family doesn’t know about the game…?”
She sighed loudly and tensely, shrugging in unease. “They know that it exists, but that’s it. I’m not
even sure my parents would remember its name.”

Which meant that if they wanted to tell them the truth, they would have to explain his world’s full
concept, culture, laws and physics first, before explaining why he had kidnapped their beloved daughter without warning. Joy.

“As for my brother…” she muttered absent-mindedly while continuing her reasoning. “He’s a complete wildcard. That’s why Lys is the safer choice to me. If we get Lys, we win.”

Sans hummed again, processing the added chess pieces now on the board and following her strategy. Part of him was still wary about the idea of contacting a friend rather than family, but since Dawn had mentioned that it was the friend who had been responsible for pulling her in this situation in the first place… Dawn wanted to implicate her in order to let her know what happened, but there could be two various motives behind it. But in the end…

“… i won’t mind if you wanna tell her too. you’re probably right, and even if you’re not… i get it.” He released a heavy breath. “and… if she needs convincing— i’ll help. or, uh, try to help.”

Dawn raised a pair of surprised eyebrows at that, but the soft smile she pulled right after that showed her gratitude and the relief of seeing he trusted her.

Still… His expression soon became that of one frightened skeleton who had seen things in his life and wanted for nothing but freedom and calm, and whose actions in the very near future could either offer a brighter destiny, or undo all his work by tainting his Happy Ending permanently. His look of desperate hope hurt in so many ways…

“are you sure this is going to work?”

As much as he trusted her, he very obviously feared that he couldn’t trust her family and friends to keep the secret. And knowing her parents… She had the same fear.

She could very well imagine her mother starting a hysterical panic attack and blabbering some nonsense to the police without letting them explain the full story. Whether the police would believe her or not was beside the point, because if this happened then they probably would get in trouble either way.

“It’ll work for Lys. I’m sure of it.” Dawn assured confidently but in an almost monotone voice, as if she had mentally repeated it in her head multiple times and only now dared utter this mantra for him to hear as well. “The hard part’s gonna be my parents… There’s no way they’ll handle everything in one go. But if we have Lys, she’ll be a huge help.”
The more she thought about it, the more confidence and trust she felt towards her friends; but Sans’s reluctance, and the fact that he was more and more trying to hide it, only raised her remaining doubts.

“Sans…” she called uneasily. “If it’s too dangerous to tell them, we can always abort the mission, you know. You don’t have to risk everything just for me.”

“no… it’s fine. i’m sure we won’t get exposed so easily. and after talkin with grillbs earlier, i… i got to think some things over.” he admitted slowly, carefully weighting his words. “they’re your family and all, and you’ll be here for a while, so… they deserve to know what happened, too.”

Dawn’s silent but meaningful nod was all he needed to feel the depth of her motivations, and to understand just how worried she was herself. Surely not having any news from her home was hurting her to the same extent as her family’s lack of information was hurting them.

Hearing his answer, her eyes flashed with a spark of determination, but some remaining doubts made it waver nonetheless. They were about to do it, that much was now certain and unavoidable. But when it came to how they were going to do it… This was where they could either save the situation or condemn it entirely. It had been hard enough to tell one monster, who knew Sans personally and had seen firsthand what was at stake. Now, telling humans from a world in which magic did not exist and who didn’t even know what the video game was about, and this without getting them to freak out and call the police immediately…? Talk about a lost cause. How glad she was that she had Lys to convince first.

Sans took a deep breath… Then, after sending her one last look and exchanging one last tense nod, he turned towards his machine and flipped the last switch. Immediately an unholy mixture of whirs and roaring hums were heard as the huge generator started trembling and the entire device vibrated menacingly; but after a few dozen seconds, thankfully, it all calmed down and the noise was soon reduced to a mix of somewhat soothing background purrs.

And then, it began. Feeling her phone vibrating in her pocket, Dawn pulled it out and watched the screen: one notification popped up; then a second; then a dozen.

“… looks like they’ve been busy.” the monster piped up in half-surprise.

“More than half of them are PMs.” she stated as she browsed her messages. “And they’re still coming…”
While he had certainly predicted that some of her relatives would have naturally sent her random messages while she was out of range about whatever daily activities she was going through in her normal life, the amount of them was something he had not seen coming. And seeing the girl’s face when she read the newest ones… Whoever sent those messages definitely wasn’t talking about the weather.

When she raised her head and finally separated her eyes from the screen to look at him, her face had lost way too many shades of pink.

“… They already called the police.”

One sentence. Just one sentence.

She immediately went back to her phone, letting her fingers run on its surface, click, brush, dance on the buttons and the miniature keyboard that sometimes appeared. Soon the screen changed to show a single name and a dorky image, along with an audible ringtone.

Sans first feared her panic could have caused her to start something reckless, but when he read that the name in question was “Lys the Nerd BFF”, he felt somewhat reassured that, even through said panic, she was at least sticking to the plan.

“Come on, come on…”

They both stared at the screen anxiously for a few more seconds, but eventually, the call ended on its own, only offering the options to try again or give up. When she gave the sidebar at the top of the screen a closer look, it finally seemed to hit her:

“… It’s ten thirty. We’re on Monday. She’s at school.” She face-palmed and grumbled. “Of course.”

“guess that can’t be helped…” Sans sighed heavily. “so, what now?”

“She’s gonna have a break soon, but it probably won’t last long enough and she’ll be in a rush.” she reasoned out loud. “I guess it’s best to wait until lunch break…”

Just as she was saying these last two words, she suddenly frowned and crumpled her face in
confusion, then looked again at the time shown on her phone.

“… We just had lunch break.”

“… looks like there might be some time difference or somethin.” the skeleton shrugged. “i guess that would’ve been a pretty big coincidence if it just happened to be the same time in both our worlds.”

She hummed, considering the implications of this reveal, and realizing that it explained a few tiny weird feelings she had had on the previous day without giving them much more thought.

However, she could not delve too much into these details as, once more, her phone started vibrating again, this time much more fiercely. Someone was trying to call her, and as soon as she saw the name, she bit her lip uneasily. She raised her eyes towards Sans, answering his silent question:

“IT’s my brother.”

“… does he know the game?” Sans asked nervously.

Dawn’s thumb was shaking, but after one more second of hesitation it brushed the screen and rejected the call. “I told you. He’s the wild card. He knows about it, but I have no idea how he’d take anything.” She sent him another look, this time with more confidence: “I think we should really stick to Lys… It’ll only take two hours at most. I can send her a PM in the meantime so she’ll call ASAP.”

The tension in his bones seemed to vanish slightly, and he nodded. “sounds good.”

The human went back to brushing her phone’s screen in various rapid motions, waltzing between apps and typing words in seconds. She tried to go for a simple and short message, but it also needed to be one that would not trigger too many questions — just enough questions to have Lys give her a call as soon as she would read it. She just needed to type, press some virtual buttons, and —

… And the keyboard button she was about to press changed from a regular space bar to an “Answer Call” green button a split second before her thumb pressed it.

Charlie had just tried to call her again right in the middle of her typing. The universe really hated them on that day.

Before either of them could process what had happened, a blurry human face appeared on the screen.
The quality of the video was terrible, but it was just clear enough to show for certain that the guy was not happy.

“Oh hey there, Dawn. Fancy seeing you here. Wherever you are.” It was strange to conceive, but the sarcasm in his voice seemed both exhausted and done, and yet spicy and alert all at the same time. “Looks like you got one hell of a crappy Wi-Fi, wow. Where you at, Montana or something?”

“Uuuuuuuuh…” Dawn tried to send a discreet worried glance at Sans, only to realize that he had already disappeared from the spot next to her and had already teleported to the other end of the room.

He was staring at her with a look of stunned panic, but at least the surprise hadn’t stopped him from acting quickly. He sure had sharp reflexes.

“So, are you gonna explain what exactly you’ve been doing?” the human quickly added, not waiting for his sister to answer anything to his previous rhetorical questions. “Or judging by your face, you probably intended to just keep ignoring me forever. Must be fitting since you didn’t tell us anything before vanishing like you did.”

“Well, i-it’s complicated but… I can— explain?” She had intended that question more towards the skeleton than towards the one she was supposed to be talking to. In response, the monster seemed to distort his skull in some sort of unsurely reluctant grimace, but eventually he tried to look somewhat supportive and shrugged, sending his arms flying dramatically in the process to emphasize his point.

“Like hell you’re gonna explain, missy.” he retorted with bitter haste. “What were you thinking? Why’d you just leave for some reason?”

Something in Dawn’s chest sank painfully.

“Wait. You… you think I ran away?”

“What else did you want us to think!?” The video’s quality had a resolution just high enough to show that he had rolled his eyes in absolute exasperation. “You disappear from your room! Nobody sees you going through the front door! You don’t tell us anything! Just so you know, Mom didn’t sleep all night, and she’s not the only one.”

Dawn flinched. Sans silently sent her a questioning and compassionately worried look, as if to ask
her if his brother always sounded this aggressive while addressing her. The guilt in her eyes seemed to be that of someone who was not used to this kind of situation, so he assumed that it was not. On one hand, it was a relief that she wouldn’t go through this sort of situation often; on the other… The fact that this specific iteration seemed so serious only emphasized the gravity of the present.

She bit her bottom lip in guilt and concern, shivering. “… How many cups of coffee did you take today?”

“Oh so you really want to know, huh?” he scoffed. “Ha. Here I thought you wouldn’t care about what we’d feel after you vanished without a trace. Maybe if you’d left at least a note or something, we’d have some clues to start investigating from.”

The tired bags in his eyes squinted slowly, as the young man reconsidered his last sentence and seemed to realize that maybe leaving clues wouldn’t have been the smartest thing to do if her goal was to not be found and that it was incredibly dumb of him to suggest she should have thought of consciously jeopardizing her own escape plan.

He needed more coffee.

“… My point is.” he sighed tiredly. “We’re gonna find you anyway. If you tell us where you are and let us bring you home, we’ll just have a talk and that’s it. I don’t know, are we not a good family or something? Is that the problem?”

Dawn’s expression literally melted into a crumpled mess of guilt and pain, with a pair of two chocolate eyes losing themselves in the void. In a last-ditch effort to find some sort of guidance, these eyes went wandering into the eye-sockets standing almost ten feet away.

She had hurt her family so deeply; they were just as hurt as her, and not only were they hurt, they were also lost. How could they have known that the reason behind her disappearance was of (somewhat) supernatural origin? Of course they would have assumed that, without any obvious exterior reason for her to leave, the only reason left could only have come from inside the family itself.

Were they feeling guilty of whatever they thought they could have done to hurt her in the past? But this wasn’t what it was about at all! She loved her family, her friends, her life… She had literally no reason to leave.

She had never wanted to leave them in the first place. She had never wanted to be kidnapped. She had never asked anyone anything. Those two pitch black holes she was losing her eyes into had never asked for her opinion before taking her here. Did Sans ever consider her relatives when he promised that she would go back to her world safe and sound? Putting her family through such emotional torture was neither safe nor sound!
If her ‘real world’ body had actually disappeared contrary to what she had previously expected, if
time was not passing so differently in both worlds, then Sans was literally stealing part of her life
away, not only from her, but from everybody she knew as well. Maybe he had not intended it that
way, or maybe he thought that the stakes of saving his world were worth inducing that pain to
others; but now, as her mind was racing and turning around those new elements she had gathered,
she herself was losing all sense of certainty over everything she thought she knew.

What was happening? She had no idea. All her previous theories seemed to be now disproved with
everything that was occurring in this instant. Yet when she was looking at the skeleton’s eyes,
although he was tense, he did not look nearly as lost as she was. After all, he was the one who had
brought her here, and he was the one who knew exactly how all his experiments had worked and
how his plan was supposed to go. Was there something obvious she had been missing ever since
the beginning?

… Was Sans consciously hiding something from her, even?

“Dawn, I’m trying to talk to you right now!”

Hearing her name brutally snapped her out of her thoughts. She looked back at her phone’s screen,
and her brother was staring gravely. She apologized in a small voice for spacing out, but he
brushed off her words and retorted:

“There’s someone with you. Isn’t there.”

The distraught distress running in her eyes took all trace of color from her face. Had she seriously
busted Sans just by looking at him? She found herself shaking uncontrollably.

“C-Charlie, it’s…”

“How many people? Are you running away together? Are they hippies!? Dawn I don’t know what
they crammed into your head but you HAVE t—”

“I’m sorry!” she exploded in panic. “I really can’t go home right now, but I promise I’ll be back! I
— I just don’t know when, but… L-look. Please. I’m not in danger. That’s all I want you to know.
I know you’re all worried about me, and I’m sorry I can’t come back, but— I-it’s just maybe a
question of a few days or weeks, I think…? M-maybe I just need a time-out—”

“Is that what you want us to tell your school? That you need a fucking TIME-OUT!?" he scowled.
“Dawn, do you have any idea how much trouble you’re in right now? Just wait ‘till Mom hears about this, she’s gonna FLIP.”

“’Cause you really think I came here by choice?!” she huffed in disbelief. “I didn’t realize you knew me that little.” Admittedly, that last one hurt to say.

“How else did you expect us to interpret it? Can you tell me why you’re the one who answered the phone?” he asked rhetorically. “If you’re implying that you were kidnapped or something, I don’t think you’d be able to talk to me right now, Dawn.”

Despite Dawn’s attempts at explaining the situation, that last sentence effectively put her at a loss of words for a few seconds, as she could not figure out where to start to even begin to explain that one rationally. Of course starting her explanation with “I was kidnapped” was not going to make sense unless this specific argument could be justified first, and she could not justify this argument first without telling her brother beforehand that she had been allowed to contact her family in order to explain what was going on because even though she was not in danger she would not be able to go back to her home before her kidnapper would be done saving his universe, and she could not explain that before explaining first why the universe needed saving in the first place, and she could not explain that without first telling him that she had been kidnapped because her presence was needed for the universe to be saved, and she could not explain that without first saying that she had been kidnapped.

This last sentence was a very convoluted way to say that no matter where she intended to start her explanations, she would first need to have another part of the situation explained first, in such way that there was effectively no way to properly start the explanation at all.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought.” Charlie spoke again, certainly assuming that the teenager’s silence was the proof he needed to ensure that he was right. “If you wanted us to think that you were kidnapped so you could cover up whatever it is you’re really doing, you should’ve tried harder than that.”

Whatever it was that Dawn answered to this accusation, Sans had stopped listening.

There could be a lot of reasons why this scene would be painful to watch for anyone, whether their reciprocate hurtful words would reach your compassion even though you did not feel involved in the argument, or whether the bickering that was slowly tearing siblings apart was annoying you; it was very likely that multiple reasons of both categories were stacking up in his mind, alongside this strange sensation he could feel weighing on his back. Either way, the skeleton eventually found himself unable to watch these two siblings being desperately at each other’s throats, as the volume of their frustrated attempts at convincing each other kept rising.
“okay, now that’s enough.”

Before they knew it, Sans was right by Dawn’s side and had already snatched the phone away from her.

Admittedly, at this exact moment when the monster found himself facing the screen, he froze for a short moment, as if he had momentarily forgotten what he had done this for, or as if he just realized that he had acted out of pure impulsiveness without having any plan in mind.

But, quickly enough, this feeling disappeared. After all, the plan had always been to tell that guy the truth. They just needed to deviate slightly from that original plan and do so earlier than they had anticipated. Surely having *him* explain everything instead of Dawn would make things easier to believe.

Speaking of Dawn, she was now stuck staring at him with a gaping jaw and a pair of round shocked eyes.

“heya.” he soon saluted the screen, casual as ever. How he could look so relaxed in such a moment was simply beyond her. “so. you’re her big bro, huh? nice meetin ya. you prolly wouldn’t care, but i’m a big bro, too. so i guess that makes one thing we have in common.”

On the screen, the pixelated, low-res picture of Charlie squinted his eyes as he approached his face to his own screen and seemingly attempted to better distinguish what was going on.

“… Who the fuck is that clown?”

… Looking at the bright side, this was a much better reaction than one of overt panic with loud screams and unstoppable and pointless running around. On the other hand, though, the young man’s expression was a lot less surprised than he had expected.

When Sans sent a quick glance at Dawn’s expression, she seemed just as surprised as him, if not more, that her brother wouldn’t show any more shock than this.

Two options were laid out in front of them. Either this guy had seen things, or, the most likely option: he simply had not fully grasped the truth behind what he was looking at, for a variety of possible reasons.

Reminiscing how events had transpired earlier, Dawn decided to go with the same strategy Sans had used with Grillby:

She remembered too little too late that Sans’s strategy had failed miserably the last time and felt compelled to face-palm and celebrate her own sheer stupidity. In the end she did not, but it was very tempting.

Charlie did not move an inch. The only traits that subtly shifted on his face slowly displayed one single rhetorical question that needed not to be uttered to maintain their impact. This expression was nothing more than the pure blandness of the perfect mixture between condescending sarcasm and absolute skepticism. In one word: “Really?”

“So. How can I put it. Um.” Dawn pursed her lips awkwardly. She took a short but deep breath, preparing her answer; and then:

“You ran away with a cosplayer guy.” her brother deduced bluntly.

Her shoulders deflated like a leaking balloon, stupid sound effect put aside.

“Oh, come on. Don’t tell me you can’t see it!” This time, she fully succumbed to the call of the legendary face-palm, and felt absolutely no regret for it. “Dude, he’s literally right in front of you, lights on and everything.”

“Yeah, I see pixels of very low quality and a cosplay with a questionably less bad quality. So what?”

Dawn could hardly believe it. How could he be so dense?!

Then again… She quickly remembered how dense she herself had been the first time she met Sans — and she had even met him face to face. Well, while they had met they were in complete darkness, so she had an excuse. What was this guy’s excuse now? The bad quality of the image?

… Judging from how blurry his own face appeared to her on her screen, admittedly, she could easily imagine how, even from up close, the image of a monster that still had an anatomy so close to a human’s could be mistaken for an actual human, thus fueling her already skeptical brother’s rational doubts. Oh how the tables had turned.

“looks like it runs in the family.” Sans whispered with a grin, unable to repress the temptation to openly reminisce.
"Shut up."

Under lighter circumstances, the dorkiness of her death glare would have only made him patronize her further.

But the situation was serious, and dangerously unstable. Luckily for him, it appeared that Dawn was taking all this even more seriously than he did, and the cogs of her brain were turning and fuming at high speed right now, desperate in their search for a viable solution. Because, obviously, as things were so far, they were going nowhere.

"Is there any way to improve the reception?" If they could make the image less blurry, Charlie was more likely to see every single detail of their surroundings and themselves in the glory of all the unearthly magic. That would be a first step; small, but unavoidable.

"doubt it. y’could try getting closer to the machine, but it won’t change much."

Well, there goes that idea. Just great.

Dawn wondered for a moment if she could ask Sans to show off some of his actual magic in order to make a point, but she quickly shuddered and shook this idea away from her mind. Either the shock would be too great and she would actually get her brother to freak out and become completely out of control, or, gracious thanks to her phone’s lack of reception and the video call’s majestic blurriness, knowing her brother, he was totally able to shrug off Sans’s bullets and other tricks as random effects, and/or Christmas decorations thrown around, even.

No matter how she was looking at it, she had no idea how to put some sense into him. Not from a distance and with such limited resources.

When once more, her brother asked her what she was doing and warned her that they were going to find her sooner or later, she couldn’t filter her thoughts anymore and only a flood of exasperated yet desperate truth exited her mouth.

"Please, you have to listen… I-I don’t know how to tell you, but even if you’re looking for me, I…I’m sure you won’t be able to find us that way."

"i confirm." Sans nodded solemnly. "if you planned on searchin around, you’ll never find us."

"What, so you’re saying that you left the country or something? You’re still in America at least, right?"
This made Dawn stop for a few seconds, as she took some time to consider her options.

“I… honestly have no idea where we are, technically speaking.” she suddenly realized.

Did the Undertale Earth look the same as hers? Were the Surface’s countries and continents even the same? How different was this world’s human History from hers?

And to push things even further, if she added that “virtual world” problem in the equation… Did anyone even bother to program the Surface’s landscapes at all, besides the few parts shown in the True Pacifist Route’s end credits?

Sans said he remembered the Surface, but… What exactly was it like? If it wasn’t part of the game’s used graphics, what use would there have been for anyone to make these additional maps at all? Was there something important she was missing here…?

“i heard mount ebott’s somewhere in california, if i remember correctly… don’t take my word for it, though.” Sans immediately answered without giving it much thought. Then he quickly turned his gaze back towards Charlie and added: “either way, uh, don’t search your california. won’t work.”

That last sentence only took a guttural huff from the young human it was directed to.

“Seriously. You’re really all taking us for idiots, aren’t you? Who do you even think you are with that stupid costume, “Skeletonymous” or something?”

For an instant he looked actually mad, but for the next, he actually lost focus and scrunched up his expression again into that of a man who so desperately needed sleep to the extent that he was struggling to think straight, but who was absolutely determined to obtain his answers.


Oh stars what a dork. Somebody just give him a bed and a pillow please. And for the love of everything keep him away from that percolator at all costs.

“what the heck is he talkin about?” Cue confused Sans noises, of course. Poor innocent monsters preserved from human culture and all that.
Dawn sighed. “Please don’t ask.”

“at least he knows about undertale, after all.” he whispered, hopefully quietly enough so that Charlie wouldn’t hear.

“Only the cringe part.” she deadpanned. “You should leave before he says something you’re gonna regret.”

The skeleton visibly hesitated with great reluctance, but thankfully he eventually gave a small resigned nod and left the screen, then the room. Maybe he would even teleport out of the house, who knows.

Anyway. Turning back towards her phone and the picture of his brother, she took a deep, but unamused breath.

She was, very and simply, done.

“Look, Charlie. You want the truth? I’m gonna give you the truth. Wait right there. Just stop memeing. And put that down.” she hurriedly added, pointing accusingly at the gigantic coffee mug he was bringing closer and closer to his mouth. “You’re gonna need some real rest after this.”

Without giving it more thought, she stomped her way out of the basement. The only question was, did she have a plan? Well, not really. But by this point, did it even matter?

As soon as she arrived in the living room, she found a familiar yellow lizard sitting on the couch, ironically sipping her own cup of coffee in peace. Since her stomping entrance was not of the discreet kind, Dawn’s presence was immediately revealed, and although she remained silent due to her mouth being probably full, the scientist’s curiosity was made obvious thanks to the spark in her eyes.

Perfect. She had her attention. The teenager flashed her friend a bright smile full of hope. “Oh hey, Al! Maybe you could help me, I’ve been trying to tell that dork of a bro where exactly I am.”

It all happened in an instant. The coffee mug went flying to the ceiling and then finished its parabolic trajectory on the floor, the spit-take was instantaneously followed by a shriek that sounded exactly like the squeaking of a mouse, and Dawn discovered that Alphys was able to jump like a kangaroo and excuse herself by reaching the kitchen from the couch in a single jump.

Oh, and, the kitchen door was slammed shut, of course. Just in case that detail was not obvious enough as the perfect conclusion of this daring escape.
Abscond she wanted, and abscond she did. She sure aced that ancient art taught by the instincts of survival.

All in all: colloquially speaking, Alphys had merely and very simply noped out of the situation.

... Thank you for reminding me that you can always count on your friends when you need them, Alphys.

As soon as the kitchen door slammed shut, a concert of hysteric yelps started, composed of sentences of the same caliber as “Are you OUT OF YOUR MIND?” and “You couldn’t even let me know before doing that in my back?”, the latter of which was immediately countered with “the same way you could’ve given me a heads up ‘bout the snowdin town residents coming back.” The two monsters seemed too invested in their argument to realize that the kitchen door was not an isolation strong enough to fully muffle their respective scolding.

“What just happened?” the elder brother asked, annoyed and uninterested but nonetheless confused. “I couldn’t see anything. It sounded like you gave someone a heart attack or something.”

“… Never mind.” she grumbled between her teeth. “I’ll just find something else.”

If she could not find help from inside…

Well, going out was out of the question, obviously. But did she really need to get out at all?

She approached the main windows of the living room from the side and carefully took a sneak peek outside. They were far, but monsters were visible.

“I don’t know what you’re trying to do, but that’s not gonna work.” her brother cynically commented.

She completely glued her phone’s screen to the window. And then she waited.

This had to work. Please work. Please please please don’t be a complete idiot.

“So what is this, a convention? A metal concert? A hippie cult thingy?”
“Dude, what do you think this is, the seventies? Just get real already! This is all real, I swear!”

“I AM getting real, you need to get real!”

Okay, now this is just getting sad. Sad and boring.

“I told you already, I can’t see shit with whatever kind of crappy reception you got.” As annoyed and done as he was, at least the big brother had the decency to at least try to help her make her case by pointing out the current flaws in her plan. “If you want to show me anything, you’re gonna need to make it clear.”

It didn’t mean that his friendly advice could be of any help, though. “Well I’d love to, trust me, but that’s going to be tough. If I get out, I’m dead.”

“Metaphorically.”

“Literally.”

She heard the repeated sounds of fingers smashing a keyboard. She face-palmed.

“What are you doing?”

“Googling the convention panels of the month. There can’t be too many locations to check out, and trust me, we ARE going to find you, Dawn.”

Darn. It really does run in the family!

The teenager pulled her phone back to her face so she could both see her brother and give him the most serious glare she could afford to give.

“Charlie, I’m serious! Just drop it already!”

“Or what?” he huffed annoyingly. “Your cosplayer friend’s gonna give me a ‘bad time’ or
something?"

She gasped. Oh no he didn’t.

… Okay, things are getting *way* too out of hand. As much fun as it could be to see Sans’s reaction to lines like these, there’s a limit to everything. This was a terrible idea since the start.

“… *I will* let you know that you are *very* lucky I told him to leave because you have *no idea* how much you wouldn’t have wanted to say that to his face.” she muttered slowly and with a mixture between fear and freezing coldness. “*Look I know* I’m gonna sound crazy when I say this, but you *need* to trust what you see and…”

Dawn froze. Eyes wide open, staring with horror and a mixture between shock and fascination, mouth gaping, breathless. If the quality of the video weren’t so low, Charlie could have seen with more clarity and certainty that her blood soon drained from her face as she became pale like the snow he had vaguely seen outside.

Then, her lips trembling as much as her cracking terrified voice, she uttered actual words:

“I-I need to go.”

His response was as immediate as futile:

“What? *Oh* no, you’re not going anywhere. You’re gonna tell me where you are *right now*, and I’m gonna pick you up— wait, Dawn, are you listening to me right now?! Dawn don’t you *dare* hang up on m—”

She hung up.

Her legs threatened to let her fall when she dashed and glued her back to the wall right next to the large window. Did she really see what she thought she had seen? Her small dozen of seconds of staring swore that their testimony was correct. But even now, she could hardly believe it. There was no way. How could he be here?!

Still attempting to convince herself that the fog could have fooled her, she poked her nose and sneaky eyes away from her hiding place as little as possible, just enough for her to be able to take
Sans’s house was, as displayed in the game, situated at the furthest outskirts of Snowdin Town; even more than what she had first thought. Instead of being close to random houses and just being coincidentally at the border, this house was definitely standing at a distance from the rest of the town.

This was what had allowed Sans’s and Grillby’s dispute to be left vastly unnoticed by the faraway bystanders…

And this was what, in this exact moment, allowed Dawn to witness this giant silhouette walking slowly towards the town, gliding silently among the dense fog that had mysteriously raised during the last few minutes and had quickly surrounded the area.

It was alone. It was silent. It was tall; hung over, due to the density of the fog and the harshness of the cold, but still advancing with a certain presence; a regal presence.

That was all she needed to know.

She barged in the kitchen at high speed. The two monsters stopped their arguing to stare in shock. She was panting.

Alphys may have mistakenly interpreted the human’s expression for a sign of anger or betrayal towards her previous act of bailing, judging by her nervous words:

“L-listen Dawn, I-I’m sorry for freaking out earlier, but you need to understand that contacting your family and telling them e-everything is—”


Dead silence. Sans froze in place, while the lizard started trembling like a golden leaf in autumn. Alphys was the first to recover enough from the shock to regain her ability to use her voice.


Dead silence. Sans froze in place, while the lizard started trembling like a golden leaf in autumn. Alphys was the first to recover enough from the shock to regain her ability to use her voice.

“Th-that d-doesn’t make a-a-any sense. W-what would he be doing here? U-unless your friend…” She was looking at Sans. No way…

“You think Grillby snitched on us!?”
“grillbs? impossible. can’t think about it.” The poor skeleton was shaking his skull frantically, filled with what only appeared to be traces of obvious yet painful denial. “dawn. are you *sure* it was him?”

“Ten feet tall goat guy with a cape and a trident?” She was panting and stuck on the verge of hyperventilation. “Yeah. Pretty sure.”

He had brought his signature weapon along with him. Whatever reason he had come for, he meant business. Definitely human business.

The more she wanted to reminisce her mental images and convince herself that it was a mistake, the more obvious it became. She had never heard of any other monsters still alive who could follow that description.

Sans’s phone buzzed. In a second it was open in his hand and displaying a single message:

[ FROM: Grillby — 02:44 PM ]
The king is here

Yeah. They figured. Still nice to get a heads up that at least their newest team member had not betrayed them as soon as he was left without their supervision.

But this only raised a different question.

If Grillby was not the one who sent the alert, then who?

Read via Screenshots Here (full formatting but may encounter loading issues)

Chapter End Notes

The ending of this chapter has been rewritten so many times, you have no idea. The real tricky fact was that the details of its ending did not even matter, but somehow, this is what made it so hard to write. Anything that happened before Grillby’s text did not matter. Quite a bit harsh for a plot-driven story. Especially when, despite everything, even the most pointless, minor details, will come back eventually to bite them in the back.

On another note, I recently discovered a wonderful Discord server: The Fanfic
Paradise! Undertale readers and fanfiction authors alike are welcome, as long as harmony remains. Here's a free invite! https://discord.gg/b9ZTyx (I'm sadly not able to create long-term invites, but I'll edit/send you other links if needed, just ask for it) And since there's also the AO3 collection, you can always check out this link right here \o/

If you ever wanted to chat with me on a more regular basis, here's a good place where you can do so easily! And, of course, if you're looking for great fanfics, you can find other works and their authors there as well ;D
Hello everyone! And sorry for disappearing during the entirety of the summer. At least, I've been productive during that time! I just didn't have access to enough internet to post any chapters properly hahaha. On the good news side, this means that chapter 11 is already in the stage of final editing, so although I'd like to wait a bit before posting it, you shouldn't have to wait for too long.

On a different note, you'll notice that I changed how the chapters are posted now! You have two links, that'll just redirect you to this page, but show the text. A little like a "spoiler" tag! The goal is that one link will give you access to the screenshots of the chapter, as usual... And the other one is for those who don't like images or are afraid that they won't load properly! It's going to be plain text, with some basic AO3 coding. So the formatting isn't there in its full glory, but it should be good enough. It's just that editing it is a huge pain, but eh, as long as it's worth it.

Of course, if you prefer reading on Google Drive or tumblr, the external links are still here too ;D So, that being said, I hope you can enjoy this long chapter! Because the next one, the Act I finale, will be even longer. Arc finales gotta be memorable, after all.

Learn When to Quit
— Act 1 —

Don’t Let Him Find Out

Scene 5.2

» Read the PDF version here! «

» Read on tumblr here! «
Heavy footsteps landed in the snow with considerate weariness, but also with patience and regal wisdom.

Asgore, the King of Monsters, turned around to one last polite smile at the subject who had brought him to his destination; and hurriedly yet he offered the ferryman some gold coins from his pocket.

Aaron blinked at the unexpected gesture, but accepted the tip and thanked him gratefully. He would have thought of adding a wink at the end of the sentence, but he restrained himself when he realized it probably would have been inappropriate.
it probably would have been inappropriate.

“Should I wait for your return?”

“No, no, it is alright.” the king asked.
“I would not want for you to stay in the cold for this long. Besides, you have some more important matters to attend to in Waterfall, do you not?”

As an answer, the semiaquatic monster merely gave the king a respectful nod; then, after bidding the King a safe journey back to the town, he let his boat drift off the coast and give in to the current, back towards his home area.

Asgore took a deep, freezing breath. No going back now. Right.

His steps left heavy imprints in the snow, but the fog kept him unaware of this fact and would have rendered his tracks useless to anyone trying to follow his tracks. It was a good distance. Was the fog always so thick and opaque? As clear as the air was near the river, it quickly became thick, so difficult to distinguish anything but ghastly shapes. After hardly one minute of walk inside the lands.

It was fortunate that he had a good memory of the town layout, even after spending more than a month visiting it. The outlines of the main town soon came into view before him, exactly where he expected them to be.

Strangely, but also as one could expect, his arrival
the exact same routine as his previous visits had. More than half of the town’s inhabitants had since his last visit; yet, somehow, in this instant, appeared as if nothing had happened at all. The presence or absence of those now long gone in welcoming him had never mattered in the first place. Just as stated above. It was eerie; but largely for You always welcome your King the same way, no matter the pains your people have suffered.

This is a part Asgore wished he did not have. Certainly, seeing his people suffer was a sight he hardly bear; but seeing them hide their pain from welcome him with looks of surprised awe and cheers because he was coming unannounced... was than anything. His people cared for their King so. They deserved a better King. They had needed a king, and in times of need, where was he? He had ignored their cries of help until it was far too late.

After he had let his people down so harshly and dire consequences, how could they still support him? This was why he was now present in this very town. Mind you, he could never fix his mistakes, nor for his past crimes. But, hopefully, he could give the protector they so desperately needed.
And if what he had been told was true, a proto
required to attend to his duty in this very moment.

"Welcome, Your Majesty." a monster for saluted him as soon as he stopped in the mid the village square. "What can we do for
As per usual, the burgundy haired frog-like already had pen and notebook in hand, and, unsu lit cigarette around (Asgore pretended not noticed her throw it away as soon as she had seen No matter the event, she was always the first rather fitting for the woman whose primary ol was to share the news to the rest of the Undergr

"Ah, Lady Garf. I am glad to see here." he returned the greeting with all ho
"I need you to gather the neighbor and maintain the crowd calm, if pos I am afraid the news I was given c wait for an article to be written distribut not when it can be firsthand."

Not wasting a moment, his subject swiftly but re nodded, before following his request without. In an instant, the woman had started running strategically and calling out to every monster gathering a majority around the plaza and ord
most athletic and influential of the remaining citizens to warn everyone else. The efficiency of her actions proved how much she knew both the town inhabitants like the back of her hand, and with her precision she was able to put this knowledge to good use.

Seeing her in action, the King couldn’t help but consider the idea that the infamous “number one word creator (and solver) in the entire Underground”, being the champion of crosswords, could also master of crossroads...

... It sounded funnier before he actually put it in context. Tori would have found a much better way to make clever use of words actually amusing.

In less than ten minutes, the entire small town in its entirety was present on the plaza and ready to listen.

“My dear friends,” he started, “I gathered you here because I was worried of a potential danger. Now, I do wish to alarm you; but if the dire warnings I have been given are verified, you will be prepared to defend yourselves.”

Asgore couldn’t help but maintain an anxious silence, reluctant again to actually reveal said “danger” for fear of causing an uproar; panicking could only make the situation worse. He slowly addressed his subjects.
the situation, after all. He trusted his people and they were aware of this fact, and he knew that and teamwork capabilities of his subjects had saved all during multiple past events; he had always been grateful to realize times and times again how ready they were to handle most emergencies...

But a merciless human child was not “most emergency.”

His people were at the edge of their nonexistence. He could not bear to make them wait any longer.

“I have been told...” He took one last deep breath and took over the last few voices who every break it in the first place. The King saw parents, their children, monsters exchanging mutual glances and looks of fear... But the murmurs quickly died down and soon all eyes were turned once again towards him. His subjects were so much stronger and wiser than he could ever wish for. Here he was, lacking faith in the consistency put all their faith in him... What a king! He was so proud of them, and all at the same time ashamed of not being able to live up to their great Lady Garf was the first who dared take a step forward to break the silence; despite all the respect she m
break the silence; despite all the respect she felt towards the main figure of authority, she felt the question his claims nonetheless:

“Please pardon my doubting, but the impossible.” she stated with as much confidence as she could muster, but with a tone nonetheless betrayed some part of irrationality. “How could a human be here? Wouldn’t you have seen it through the cameras?”

Well, thank you for your words, but we all expect some kind of defense to come from someone else. No wonder one could he be doing...? Oh, there he is.

Finally, Grillby walked out of his pub at a fast pace, joined the commotion, as if somehow he had managed to notice it sooner. Then again, this is what most of us would have thought; the keenest eyes could have noticed him surreptitiously pocketing his cell phone a split second before he left.

Since he had missed the beginning of the conversation, hardly anyone around him paid any attention to his arrival, nothing stopped the ongoing debate as another monster advanced from the crowd to add his thoughts:

“There’s one right at the exit of that tunnel, the one with the sign,”
Ruins and another in the main cross section; an orange demon-like monster supported. If they managed to avoid the cameras in the area, there is no way a human could have gotten past the one filming the Ruins’ door without being seen.”

“I can confirm that.” a scarfed mouse with a mustache said. “I’ve been keeping an eye on all the cameras in the area, and nothing has changed. Nobody went out of the Ruins.”

Asgore maintained his silence, but gave a weak, small, reassured smile, and nodded slowly. It seemed like the information and simple contradiction could by itself be enough to convince him; and, after all, who did you expect him to believe more? His subjects, of course. Especially the ones that knew the field and lived in it more than he did. The only thing he heard was still a mere rumor, after all; nothing more.

Still... Soon a rabbit teenager offered a new theory: "Wait a minute! So, if no human could have fallen through the Ruins, someone DID see one, then...”

The deduction clicked in everybody’s minds all at once. There was _one_ possibility for a human to have avoided the cameras: if it just so happened that the human passed by the...
knew of their existence, at least regarding stationed in the rest of the Underground. The one located at the entrance of the Ruins ensured it was completely impossible for anyone to enter the Ruins without being spotted, since it was the but it did not prevent a different scenario. involved the premise that instead of a freshly new

The rabbit’s dark implications were not only uttered in a shuddering voice, but they also quickly caused panic in the rest of the crowd. Cries of “They were here whole time!” “What if it wasn’t a dead?” and “We’re doomed!” resonated all around. The dumbfounded King, who desperately tried to get the audience back to its previous state, quiet and listen, but who failed to do so for at least twice the time would have wished.

Grillby’s darkest theories were confirmed as he realized that Asgore’s presence was far from coincidental; instead, he already knew.

Part of him felt like he should care more than he did in present time. He did worry for that teenager certainly worried for Sans, but... Maybe he just didn’t the full extent of what truly was at stake. The supposedly stuck in a time loop, after all; maybe instead wasn’t the eight year? Sans could still be
just wasn’t the right one? Sans would still have time to try again, wouldn’t he?

Obviously, he did not wish for that to happen. He even have the slightest idea of what would happen to every single person he knew if this timeline didn’t go well. It had been implied that the universe would rewind itself due to the game’s influence, but things went differently, unbeknownst to everyone.

This timeline had to be the right one. He really hoped it could still be. But then... How could anything past Asgore? Was this the moment to let the truth out? Did he have any chance to convince anyone at all?

“Now, now, please remain calm!” the king ordered for the umpteenth time. Thankfully, this was successful. “We are all afraid of what could happen if these rumors were true, but panicking will only lead us to doom. I am here to shed light on these claims. You all know the saying: pray for the worst, hope for the best. Please stay calm and ready to defend yourselves... But do not give up. Whether a human is hiding here or whether it is the same human as the one from last month or not... I can assure you that I will ensure your protection. I have no doubt in what we will do next.”
Your fear is justified; but do not let it consume you. Last time, the... took us by surprise. Now... Maybe we should ensure the advantage of the number.

This was bad. Really bad.

“Now, if any of you have seen anything out of the ordinary recently, no matter how small; please do not keep it secret. We should gather as much information as we can get.”

“I believe Sans has been staying here multiple occasions during the past weeks.” Lady Garf reminded. “He has been staying here the longest and I believe that he is quite observant. If anything happened in our absence, he is the one who could have noticed it.”

... Aaaand he should have held that thought for a moment. Things could always get so much worse in just an instant. He dared not pray that none of his neighbors would notice.

“Speaking of him, didn’t he get into an argument with Grillby or something?”

... The Angel really had deliberately cursed his luck.

“Well, I don’t know if you were arguing, but it almost looked like it earlier...”
but it almost looked like it caused the orange demon quickly corrected his statement, but he was still deeply puzzled. “I thought you even saw bullets at some point?”

Thankfully, Grillby had anticipated that last question and prepared a hopefully somewhat plausible answer. “Oh, right. In fact, Sans was looking for a sparring partner; after spending so long in his basement with no one around, who could blame him for wanting to exercise with a friend?”

Well, admittedly, he should have expected the wide-eyed, perplexed and skeptical eyes to target him after saying something as ridiculous as this.

“Sans? **Exercising**?” A pair of eyebrows arched almost a full inch above their usual location. “Now I’ve heard everything.”

“Well, I never saw him practice,” a voice went in, thankfully in his defense this time, “but the rumors are true and he’s really one who stopped the last human; I must’ve come from somewhere, right?”

“I can confirm that the last human was very dead, and that only Sans was present at the time. I participated...”
the investigation and wrote the art after all.” Thank you, Lady Garf. Thank you.

The first monster hesitated, but then he nonvisibly satisfied with this justification. “That explain it.”

This went a lot easier than he had hoped, and he would not complain. Maybe there would not be need for the truth to come out just yet, in the end.

But then... A child’s voice echoed from the back row, crowd, indignant and distrustful.

“If it’s dead, where’s the soul?”

The child was quickly silenced by one of his parents. The seeds had been planted. The burgundy haired repeated that the human had been certified “undoubtedly dead”, but this was not enough as a Some murmurs started to argue that Sans realistically have had the power to kill a human when everyone else failed. Others responded that had not happened, then how could Sans still be the human missing; unless, of course, Sans could some completely stupid reason faked the human before taking it in.

This last conspiracy theory was so undoubtedly abit sounded largely stupid enough to work, some u
“The human’s body was retrieved and buried long ago.” the King thankfully confirmed.

“I would have personally noticed if somehow were still alive and escaped their coffin.”

This quickly tamed the crowd and silenced the loud voices.

“I came after hearing the smallest rumors, because I did not want to take any potential risks. However, as Garf demonstrated, it appears that only the last human cannot be a true anymore, but that it is impossible for any other human to have made their way into the Underground at all.” he continued.

“As such, my advice still stands. The rumor may be false today; but do not forget it. One day, it may become true.”

Various gestures and words of agreement resonated through the crowd, reassured and confident. Asgore took a deep breath before apologizing for coming and soliciting subjects in vain, but nobody held him responsible. To the contrary, many offered to let him stay for the celebration they had planned for the evening, or to just host the time of tea and various refreshments before...
Seeing here his perfect opening for a perfect dinner, naturally, Grillby offered everyone present to refreshments at his pub; thankfully, the main target of the idea charming and generous, and once they agreed to something, nobody will voice any opposition.

A good dozen monsters followed behind him as he turned back towards his eponymous building, the King of Monsters. He took the orders, and as soon as he reached the counter, he pulled his cell phone from his pocket and typed:

[ TO: Sans – 03:27 PM ]
False alarm he doesn't think there's any humans here anymore. I'm keeping him and others busy.

Good. That should do it.

Now... He just had forty-seven orders to take.
He was so fortunate his interns were still here to help.

“...Please pardon my indiscretion, did you say something about Sans?”

Asgore gave the fire elemental the brightest, blissfully oblivious smile the world could ever create.

“Why, yes. I was just saying that I certainly pay him a visit, while we are here. Alphys told me that she intended to join him today! It would be the perfect opportunity to salute...”
the perfect opportunity to salute efforts.”

“............. Certainly, Sire.” he noted. Grillby, who had previously sent multiple texts, Sans updated on the situation, promptly went back to his previous texted claims that they were in the clear.

[ TO: Sans – 04:13 PM ]
NEVERMIND HE’S COMING

“... It’s still Asgore. He’s a softie. Right? Isn’t any way we could, just, tell him everything? Can you guys find a way to let him in on this?”

The nervous laughs Dawn obtained were enough to know that, no, they could not. Part of her wanted for some actually worded and detailed explanation, why, but she quickly rationalized that, no matter frustrating it was to remain stuck in her state of clues, there were much more pressing matters at hand.

“okay. anyone got actually feasible ideas?”

Although the skeleton’s question seemed to be asked to both girls present, the conversation he engaged clearly meant to evolve between the two monologues. Ignored the human’s presence almost entirely.

“She can’t stay here.” Alphys assured.
she can’t stay here.” Alphys assured, what was supposed to be obvious to her in order to give the brainstorming session a stable start. “I’ll find her for sure, sooner or later.” Her only answers were a pair of raised eyebrows from Dawn’s part, and a firm nod from Sans’s. So she closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and said:

“I can take her somewhere else while you distract Asgore.”

“that’d be cool, thanks.”

He stopped his pacing to close his eye-sockets with his hands to concentrate for a bit, and just a few seconds later he opened them again and threw whatever object he had mysteriously materialized inside of his hand. It definitely wasn’t there a minute ago. A bit surprised but repressing it just as quickly, Alphys raised her hands and caught the item without flinching. Only then could Dawn realize that it was a set of keys. So she didn’t have time to say:

“third one on the left of the rocks.”

There was a sharp nod. The lizard scientist was not going to question anything regarding this whole mess. From what these keys were for to how Sans had them or whether or not he had just stolen them. He didn’t care.
someone else. Priorities, probably.

“We’ll see you later.” she assured greatly.
“You know the place.”

Dawn looked up from her phone (she had been daydreaming for a few seconds when she had realized that she had a WhatsApp call with her brother, the message she had to write to her friend had been sent as it was before the call or right after it ended due to her not pressing a few more buttons in her panic). One door leading to another, she dared ask candidly:

“... So we’re going somewhere, but without...” she addressed Sans in confusion. “Wouldn’t it be faster if you just, teleported us there?”

“it’d sure be faster, but. two things.” And he two bony fingers to support his point. “i need to be here when he comes and probably cover for him as well, and i need to stay behind because something goes wrong, i’m the one who’s likely to catch up and find you.”

“Also, there’s no way we’re leaving without supervision where we’re going. Game or not, you’d get lost in no time and it’d take hours to find you.”

The teenager wanted to ask the most obvious
The teenager wanted to ask the most obvious that was to say *where* they were going, but they merely took her arm and pulled her towards them while saying that they had no time and needed to immediately.

“Ookay, so later then?” she tried to send a wave to Sans, who simply acknowledged it with a lazy but concerned nod.

“yeah, good luck. and al?”

“I’ll keep you updated.” she assured, pulling her phone as proof.

“great. i prolly won’t read your texts while i’m here, but i’ll try.”

And with that, the kitchen door closed behind them. Dawn wondered why they were entering the kitchen places, while they were supposed to leave the house quickly the solution to this inconsistency offered under the form of another inconsistency: here in the corner, a back door that led them to a narrow snow hidden by a row of large, dark pine trees.

So *here* was that previously mysteriously missing the back of the house, after all. But why was it linked to the kitchen? The game only ever made a connection
the hypotheitic back door and Sans's basement. That was... weird. Was the game making it a
two-way between the back door and the workshop by her
into a more complex path she would need to follow
entering the kitchen and exiting it to take another
under the stairs in the living room? She wondered
Maybe it was all a trick of perspective. She had
that the mezzanine in the real life version of the
could easily access the balcony on the upper floor.
The game made it absurdly impossible for some
Either way. Dawn tried to bury her head in
shoulders as if it could hide her face, as she kept
her yellow friend. Thankfully, it appeared that
enough the area, or they were just lucky to not
anyone else. After a half minute of fast but quiet,
the two girls reached the first area devoid of trees.
And most importantly, they reached water.
The first surprise was that instead of meeting
hooded figure standing on a lonely boat, there
living soul in sight, and about a dozen docked
without supervision. A look to the side of the
Dawn spotted a wooded cabin with a large sign
simply: “boat rental.”
Well. That was self-explanatory.
“Quick, it’s that one.” Alphys whispered, as she silently dashed to the ship she was pointing to. The set of keys firmly kept inside a tense fist.

There was no objection; in an instant, they were at their target and Dawn hurriedly but carefully stepped off. At first she thought that this place was supposed to be a Snowdin spot from which the River Person would be able to attack, but a more thorough look at the surroundings and analysis of the path they had taken from Sans convinced her that instead, this had to be an entirely different location; one that was, fascinatingly, supposedly completely inaccessible to the player — not just being unreachable, but by being entirely impervious, notice even by staring at the boundaries of the game.

All things considered, it was undoubtedly cool that now, the players were able to access parts of the map that no player had ever knew existed.

While Alphys took the commands at the front (in the mere wooden boat, this one was apparently manned by the human) took cover under a tarp that some conveniently left there, whether by chance or by order of Sans shenanigans. When she noticed, the lizard noticed her smart move with a short hum of approval. A second later, Alphys turned the key, and they were
Never had she imagined that there could be more than one boat in the Underground; most fanfictions had read only assumed that, just like in the game, there ever was one boat and one River Person in the end. Then again, not only having more boats for even daily trips made more sense, but in this very climate they were very fortunate that they could find them, they wouldn’t have to walk in the open for much longer.

As much as she enjoyed the idea of walking through discovering the Underground in all its details, there simply not the time. Besides, what she had quickly learned from her small hike the day before was that the portion of the Snowdin area that would lead to the caves was not only much longer than the game made it sound, it was also devoid of any place to hide if they so chose. Being able to bypass most of the dangerous parts of the trip was a blessing.

Dawn was very, very tempted to look out and across to the outside world while they were sailing through it all, but the more rational part of her mind reminded her to keep her eyes below the blanket and to focus her efforts as still and invisible as she could. Her life could depend on it, after all. Tourism would be for another... After what felt like an eternity, the silence was broken by the simple growls of the motor sloshing...
beyond the simple growls of the motor sloshing in water.

“We’re entering Waterfall. You’d better grab something steady and brace yourself? For what? Dawn couldn’t see it, but she had pressed a button, and the consequence this man had was what let her gather new clues regarding answers she was seeking: the boat shook wildly for a few instants, and although it soon came back to a steady state, it appeared that it was not relying on any solid ground anymore. Unable to stop her curiosity and confusion, the teenager gave up and peeked a tiny glance out of the window. Soon her eyes doubled in size.

“We’re FLYING...?!”

Although she had managed to retain her exclamation, the level of a shocked whisper, the lizard shut the door hurriedly, and she apologized for her moment of incautious prudence and discretion. Thankfully though, her friend still found the time and opportunity to explain:

“News flash, in case you hadn’t noticed. Waterfall has waterfalls. Everywhere. It’s completely impossible to navigate with a regular boat, especially if you want to get to the third floor.”
towards her interlocutor and add: “Looks like the game doesn’t show you everything after all.”

No. No, it did not.

“I never imagined you’d know how to fly something like this...” she confessed.

The lizard repressed a snort as if she had heard the stupidest of assumptions.

“And who do you think built rocket-fueled babies? Santa?” she laughed proudly. “...Well, I just invented the rocket, I didn’t build all of them.”

Dawn pushed her head just high enough above the tarp to send her a full look. “Dude. That’s amazing...”

“...Undyne wanted me to design them sails acting like wings, like in movies with pirates and flying ships something.” She repressed a bittersweet laugh. “That would’ve been a lot cooler, absolutely impracticable. Too bad we have to settle for regular rockets instead.”

Oof... Not the best timeline to reminisce, huh?

“...If it can make you feel better, boats with rocket sails...”
are still super cool.”

Alphys shrugged slightly, but she was already turning her back to her and fully focusing on the comm.

“Haha, thanks. It doesn’t mean I have a lot of experience maneuvering though. So bear with me.”

The human nodded and ducked again, pulling the skirt in front of her so she could go back to full stealth.

“Still, if you don’t mind I, uh, didn’t ask before. Where are we going exactly? Is that a place I know?”

The monster took a minute of silence before speaking, scanning around them, ensuring that nobody was anywhere near.

“If I say ‘Garbage Dump’, does that mean any bells?”

Oh. That suddenly made a lot of sense. “Oooh, I probably should’ve seen it coming, in retrospect.”

Of course the best place for hiding, if you had a monster by your side, was going to be the Dump. The game was that she knew the field like the back of her hand and it wasn’t hard to imagine that this kind of place was full of hiding spots. If she had allegedly taught Bratty how to search the place and find the best junk on field trips with them on various occasions, it was...
On field trips with them on various occasions, it’s telling that in this present situation, going to sheriff was going to give them a very serious advantage. That, and, given how this was the first place Alpha think of bringing Frisk to during their mock-training, according to what her lab entries claimed, this site is her favorite place to hang out, period. She should’ve been able to predict that this would be the desert she’d choose for their (hopefully temporary) escape.

After a long, almost silent wait, the boat touched ground once more. The lizard invited Dawn to come out of her hiding place and follow her, and she went without a word. As soon as she jumped out, she felt why it felt like the boat had indeed reached solid ground just like the game showed it, the area was submerged all at the same time, there was hardly enough deep water to reach her knees. The water was cold, but that was exactly as one should expect from the

Overall, the one thing the game had preserved allowed the scenery to look so innocently calm, almost as beautiful and entrancing as the real locations in the Underground; but now that she was standing there instead of looking at it, distance of a screen, reality was quick to remind reason why this was called a garbage dump:
It was, obviously, filled with garbage. Her nose was quick to catch up with that fact.

One thing she found herself thinking about—monster food was known for being of magical origin, granting it with many advantages; one of which was that it would never spoil.

But, then again, where did all that garbage come from? Humans. And regular matter, contrary to magic, was not inherently sensitive to the various chemical and biological processes induced by either the dioxygen present in the air or microorganisms, and many other things. This... wasn’t healthy. Had she been vaccinated against something?

Whether she had been or not (hopefully she didn’t remember if it was one on the list of those illegal by the law but it could be), it was not like they really had a choice at this point. She was a human, and she needed to hide for a while. The garbage dump was, strictly speaking, a place where you could hide pretty much anything and then you’d have to spend hours to find it again. This was a plan she shouldn’t be considering, simply because it seemed like the best option she had for the time being. Her nose would have to suffer.

She wanted to be the hero protagonist? She had to face the cold reality of getting her hands, and probably more than just her hands, dirty. In the literal sense most
than just her hands, dirty. In the literal sense more than the metaphorical one, in this specific case.

Still, she couldn’t help but wonder. She once heard that humans, like most animals, had their taste buds and sense of smell naturally attuned so that some of the noxious and unpleasant compounds would taste or smell different to them, as a warning and deterrence from consuming those compounds. She didn’t know whether it was true or not. Could it be that since monsters were not too easy to kill, they did not have that problem? Or was it that Alphys was seemingly being bothered by the surrounding smell just that she had scouted this place for years on end and was just used to it?

Well, she was stuck in this place and once they found the perfect hiding spot, she would need not to make any noise while for the sake of stealth. Don’t judge her for looking for distractions by pondering pointless questions.

“Here. That should do it for now.”

What Alphys was pushing her towards was the trunk of what, in another time, had been a car. It looked rusty, it was definitely never going to move again. It would be very lucky if they managed to just open it by any means other than kicking them open by battering a ram at full force, but still: on the bright side, it was surrounded by random, tinier junk, and what
inside was ensured to be very easily hidden from an exterior perspective. In fact, had Alphys not told her to look, she would have certainly shot a glance paying the car’s remnants any attention.

So. For hiding spot standards? This was the way. They just needed to find their way inside somehow.

“Maybe we could find a crowbar around here,” the teenager immediately offered with confidence. Surely if they had found a car of all things, the common and relatively tiny tool would be easier to find in comparison.

Nonetheless, the scientist firmly shook her head.

“No need, I have better than...”

There was a light sound nearby. The girls fell silent, complete stillness engulfed them. The light resumed, but seemed to be far enough away so that they did not think that whoever they belonged to necessarily aware of their presence.

Still. This was a close call, and as such, some precautions needed to be taken.

Alphys pushed the human against the rocky dark corner, keeping a short but steady arm to block her vision, just in case she would have thought of something.
just in case she would have thought of purely questioning her judgement. “Stay back.”, she said, her action were not enough to convey the message. If the situation weren’t calling for it, Dawn mentally commented on how her serious expression and general demeanor were most probably inspired by the animes she was watching so much.

At least, such expression could only mean one thing: she had a plan. And as an immediate confirmation to this, glowing smithereens started gathering in the palm of the lizard’s other hand. A bullet? Only one question could be asked in this situation. Maybe it had to do with the fact that Alphys was never shown using magic by herself, but she definitely had something up her sleeve. Something effective.

In the game, Alphys was never explicitly shown using magic. The only visual clue was during her fight as a Lord in the True Pacifist Ending, and during this short scene, she would use the same patterns as Mettaton’s. What were the components of Mettaton’s Regular blocks. Lightning-shaped bullets. Flying retractable arms. Disco balls playing with cyan lasers. Tiny Mettaton bullets pretending to be Poppins. And most importantly...

Bombs.

... Stay back indeed.
There was a deaf sound, and then a wall of rocks fell again and again, always creating more sound. When it finally stopped, the room they were in had only one exit way.

"... Well. It looks like we won't be going out without Sans's tricks, after all,"

... Which meant, according to what was just said, that there were now no exit left. One minus one meant zero. There was still a narrow access to upper floors, and even the actual Surface, if Dawn could trust the direction they could vaguely see when she would look up in the direction where the waterfalls were coming from. Sans probably did not count as properly accessible exits, but from the bright side, though, it meant that at least they wouldn't run out of oxygen to breathe. Assuming that they needed to breathe oxygen, of course, which she wasn't sure of. Monster biology was a mystery.

Upon looking a little further down the shallow stream, Dawn saw a single waterfall that seemed to lead down to a lower level, contrary to the other ones that came from the upper floors. After asking Alphys, though, it was soon revealed that this one would lead nowhere and only get them even more stuck. Thankfully, the plan for now was not necessarily
of the room. Just to find the perfect hiding place.

“So the plan is that I— we hide in the car. And
She shrugged. “Let’s focus on getting
first, that’ll be a good start.”

The lizard approached the nearest door of the one
then placed her hands close to the handle; small
glows appeared and tried to push through the
noticeable opening between the door and the rest
structure, but the result was going to be slow and
at best.

About two minutes later, a frustrated pout started
itself gradually evident on her muzzle every passing
She almost started to question whether the
whatever other oxidized alloy that was, was still
fuse and soldered the door to the rest in
separating them. That, or it was just that she had
trouble making her bullets both tiny and powerful
one or the other she could manage, but both at
same time was definitely trickier than she had anticipated.

Another minute, and a bar of solid metal
appeared in her field of vision and violently started
opening near the door. Apparently Dawn had forgotten
long-awaited crowbar, after all.

“Okay. In my head, I had pictured t
differently.” she sighed in disappointment.

“No worries. I mean, you can’t have all the fun, you know.” the teenager joked with a playful grin.

Dawn stabbed the car once more, this time fully to the hilt, trying to lodge the bar inside the opening so she could close it. The lever physics still required a force greater than she had thought, but a combination of perseverance and elbow grease soon paid off.

“Don’t be too cocky.” Alphys smirked, although the corners of her mouth were a bit stuffy.

“We both know Undyne would’ve been able to keep up with it in just a second.”

“She would’ve suplexed the whole car, you know. Right? Maybe even the entire pile of...”

The human’s sentence was never finished, because as she saw what she thought she had seen, Alphys instantaneously forgot what she was about to say. Alphys had blocked the only exit. They had assumed due to this, aside from Sans’s shortcuts, nobody would be able to enter or leave the room anymore.

This assumption could not have been more wrong.

She instantly recognized that tiny shy ghost that looked like a white, head-shaped, with a cute, innocent face
like a white bed sheet with cartoony wet eyes.

fangirl in her felt the immediate need to stupidly

crowbar behind her back and reassure the poor
despite their bad luck, they were not in danger:

“Wait, Napstab—!”

She froze and forced her lips shut, biting them as she could. Alphys sent her the most betrayed
exasperated “Are you freaking SERIOUS right look she could muster.

She had to find a cover up, and quick.

“C-c-coughing! I-I was coughing! Y-y-y-you ‘Napstachoo’, that’s totally how it goes when cough, the air is sooo stuffy in this dump and nothing weird here, not like we could’ve even before or anything, hahaha, you’d know, COUGH COUGH.”

Alphys’s face-palm made it look like she was trying not to scream “Thank GOD this cringey tirade of cheap excuses is over” in angry relief. Napstablook stared with giant empty eyes, their small mouth wide open but voiceless.

Then the poor innocent ghost became less and less and vanished in half a second.

Down wanted to smack herself so hard right now.
“They didn’t buy it did they.”

The lizard scientist took a deep, deadpanned of disappointment. “Did you honestly that even if they did, they would stayed around?”

“... Touché.”

When will she ever learn? Whenever she opens mouth to talk to someone new, she slips up. like, the third time around or something.

Alphys exhaled a harsh, disappointed sigh.

“Well, now we can give up on THAT for a hiding spot. Maybe even the room is compromised, now.”

“... I’m sorry?” the human tried to apologize. In grand scheme of things, they had been discovered long before she made her stupid mistake. Nothing could have changed that even if she handled things in a smarter way; but still, they have done without that second part.

The lizard merely brushed off her apology, irrelevant and unnecessary with a literal hand. “Just help me find a way out of here”
Another quick glance at what used to be a wall was enough to convince both of them that unless they could be with them suplexing all those boulders clear the way by themselves would be both too dangerous. Thus, by default, they only had a chance of trying climbing the waterfalls and reached the upper location; well, it most probably was, otherwise they would have thought of escaping through that, but this only brought another question. Even if they reached the ceiling, would they find another way in the Underground, or would the barrier be the latter escape scenario.

“Do you think they’re gonna tell Asgore?” she asked while trying to find the best waterfall to jump off. One thing was for sure, the opening was too small for the flying boat, and probably too narrow for them to pass through. Given how stuck they were, they could blame her for resorting to wishful thinking.

“I don’t know who they’re going to but they’re definitely telling someone,” the monster shrugged heavily. “And if someone doesn’t end up finding them, they’ll realize something’s up.”
While the teenager walked about, trying to climb random piles of garbage around, Alphys had soon her own search and pulled out her phone, texting frantically and asking him for news. She was not any answer, but this did not deter her from typing.

Thankfully, after more than twenty minutes, he replied. Except that instead of a message, he was actually

“Did something happen?” was the first Alphys asked fearfully as soon as she picked up.

“Things were pretty smooth before that showed up and told us that after seein’ a large and comin’ to make sure that no one got hurt saw you tryin’ to smuggle a human in a car.”

Well, turned out that Napstablook went directly to after all. Conveying the news in the span of half was pretty fast, all things considered. Then again, we were a ghost. Phasing through walls made the trip

“Where are you right now?”

It was safe to assume that if Sans was talking freely, then Asgore wasn’t around to hear them the

“waterfall, grillbs an’ i are on our way to the
There was one word in that sentence that most did not belong in the context of ‘escape’ and ‘Waterfall’.

“Grillby’s with you?! When— how did that happen? And in Waterfall???”

“he came along with the ghost, i didn’t think to take the ghost through and took him with me when asgore fell and we found an arrangement in the medium anyway, tell us where you are and we just make it in one piece.”

“The Dump, L3 east.” Alphys explained instead.

“Just look for the cave-in where normally find the access from the tunnel. Whatever Sans replied to that, she retorted having listened for just a few seconds, claiming that “It like a good idea at first!”, that she had planned for them to make their way to “L2” but it was busted before that, and that she had absolutely anticipated that a single bullet from her part would cause much damage, let alone that it would get them to that part of the Dump and that getting to “L2” would make them even more trapped than they already were. Dawn was only vaguely listening, as she continued to search and search for anything that could be of any use.
their current situation. She already had her recent crowbar and she did not want to think of actively for weapons, but sadly, the more rational and part of her mind reminded her that, first, this time meant to be Reset at some point anyway, and second, given the current circumstances, she did not really have a choice and had better get prepared to defend herself every way she knew. Even though she really didn’t want to think of actually hurting anyone, obviously, even Asgore. Sure, he was the one who wanted her death. It’s Asgore. He’s a softie! One of the most adorable of giants in the universe... Besides, it was his job, but like he actually wanted to kill anyone, right? Was he really out of the question?

Well, in the game, the “Talk” option could only do as lower his Attack after persevering for three turns did this amount to in regards of effectiveness, a th Could she possibly call the “#2 Favorite Character” and get a bonus for being part of his fanclub...? Just kidding. That was just some very fancy wishful

“Dawn. Sans says we should take care of You’re gonna want to plug your ears.

If the implications of what was to come should have been predictable to her, she did not have the time
them before they occurred right before her eyes. A split second after Alphys confirmed on the plan that the way was clear, a ten foot diameter glowing amber beam made its way through the thick impenetrable, fallen rocks, obliterating every particle caught in its path until, after the light gradually toned down, all that was left was an almost perfectly circular hole, cleanly delimitating the parts where the rocks had been either split or melted away.

Through the other side, Sans quickly stepped out of the bottom part of the hole, then jumped down to floor level and walked to them, offering to help Alphys. He willingly let the human to her gawking, preferring to comment on her ungracefully hanging jaw.

“we need to move. any ideas where to go next?”

Alphys had felt his urge to make some random joke about how likely it was that his rescue attempt had aroused some interest in single living (and possibly no-longer-living) souls in the Underground, but he had wisely decided against it in the sake of not wasting time. As such, she quickly pitched Hotland as their next destination and followed Sans through the hole, with the teenage human right behind her.

On the other side stood a giant, nearly six feet tall, skull, with an innocently dumbfounded Grillby sitting on top with crossed legs, waiting for them to arrive.
question. The skeleton quickly motioned Alphys up as well, before doing so himself.

To Dawn, it finally hit her.


The always, ever rational and perfectly logical person mind finally woke up and, as usual, pretended to never fallen asleep by telling her how stupid she was not figuring it out sooner. But still, the rest of her being pleaded with force and absolute indignation how outraged and offended it was that her rational mind could ever be so unemotionional and cold towards obviously terrifying matter, just look at that thing in holy mother of all flipping animes why was it so deadly and oh so very realistically deadlike and—

“dawn, you waitin’ for the entire woshua to come and clean up the mess or what? ’cause that shit’s not comin, but soon the rest of the town will get Wild.

Well, there was his “my blaster woke up every dead soul in the underground” joke. Maybe he couldn’t help it and needed to find one moment to let the tension somehow, after so much time and sense. Even if his joke’s only purpose was to remind daydreaming human of said seriousness and of the
daydreaming human or said seriousness and of the nature of their situation. Dawn slowly and nervously turned her head to with a pair of distressed eyes, her neck trembling in rotation of her head had involved uneven gears that movement to be split into various tinier acts step separated from the others by a sudden, pain Her jaw opened a bit more than it already was sound came out of it.

No no no – didn’t you see what it just did to the – you are NOT riding that thing – nope – never even if your life depended on it – which it does not way – but still absolutely NOT – ONCE – EVER

Just before Alphys could ask the classic and overused “Dawn, are you okay?”, Sans remembered and the source of the problem all at once (besides the problem that stood before them and refused to some incredibly stupid and suicidal reason). As a disappointed skull became a little bit more sym but also ten times more impatience and deadpan. “... please don’t tell me you’re havin a episode or whatever it is you call it. you ne one after the first time and you said you’d be please don’t start now.”
The only response that came out of the teenager was a disharmonious voiceless suite of disarticulated vowels, which could be translated with much something along the lines of “SORRY I SWEAR I’ followed by other beheaded words of similar meaning.

Grillby thought of this as the first opportunity to speak his mind:

“... A ‘phobia’? I don’t think I got to hear that one yet.”

Sadly for him, it appeared that his friend was in the mood, as the only thing he uttered to acknowledge the question’s mere existence was “long story.” Then, to Dawn: “look, i don’t know how bad it is, but we don’t have all day. can’t you keep your eyes closed or something?”

Judging by the fact that the human’s eyes were once and that she visibly tried to take a very noisy breath, she was at least listening to him and willing to help, and she most certainly would have worked on controlling her tremors and irrationality the same even if he weren’t here to urge her. The effectiveness of her attempts was, at best, do
mental countdown of five seconds (more like one quarter to be fair), the nearly one-foot-long heart-like shape in her chest started to glow in a saturated blue hue; and then her entire self was catapulted from the ground with an acceleration during the very short amount of time needed to flying and landing in Grillby’s lap without either consent, became probably stronger than the limit her respectably absolute lack of g-force tolerance.

Only counting on the bartender’s ability to balance and ensure that his freshly handed bagga stay grounded as well, not a single more second wasted and the giant skull dashed away, hovering water and land alike at high speed. Fortunate, given mission of the highest importance (or unfortunate for him personally), the baggage was not an inanimate object but a living being, and soon the survival kicked in and assisted him in maintaining the place. It was just a minor inconvenience that the adopt she adopted was to take hold onto the nearest thing was not magic floating bone, in order to do so with some form of comfort for her constant desperation. Under other circumstances, the rational part of her mind would have led her to question how she could him without burning, or how it was possible to hold it, but it was no doubt that in this situation, they
all; but it appeared that in this very moment, all rationality were entirely gone.

The poor fire elemental tried to politely ask the elf to let him go, but judging by the closeness of the emotion, the force she was putting in her (paradoxically) shaking arms, one could only assume that she was deep in her catatonic trance to do so much as acknowledge his words. Upon seeing the pain and shock distorted her fleshy face... Even without knowing the origin of this intense and unexpected reaction, the part of him that was a father could not help but feel at least the compulsion to reassure this terrified child. Because, only then did he realize it, this was a child; she was older than his son, but even after knowing her for far less than a day, there were enough hints regarding her young and naïve mentality.

He had never considered it before, but just like previous humans (except for the genocidal vi- machine)... this one was a child, just like the other children, an entire race was willing to kill one another over the mere crime of existing, while she herself was just one of her kind. Nobody, let alone a child, should have to live through this nightmare. Before he realized it, his left hand went to rest on her tiny human’s shoulder, as he tentatively rubbed his fingers on her shirt. At first she did not move away, an
tensed even more upon feeling his touch without but soon the calming gesture and overall warm presence slowly soothed her back to, if not reality, a more pleasant tranced state. If her embrace was humanly strong, he would have almost believed somehow fell asleep.

After a long moment of silent roaming, eventually called out to Sans and asked: "You that a while ago already, but it's on my mind ever since, so... What did mean exactly when you said that A flipped out?" An ounce of skepticism be seen in her voice and nonexistent eyes. "I could see him shocked and confused of course. But angry...?"

Probably because Sans was too busy 'driving' decided to answer on his behalf; besides, contrary skeleton friend, he could provide some actual information that only he had been able to witness.

"Some citizens suspected that Sans hiding the human from last month proved that it was absurd, but when the ghost arrived, I think they persuaded the King that these rumors were true. The bartender held his thoughts and sent someone from somewhere, but..."
Looking at this human, yet paradoxically innocent and seemingly harmless face, reminded him of how uniquely this specific specimen was; of where she allegedly came from; of what this world allegedly was to her.

Thinking back of the phenomena he had witnessed, the time he was teleported in Waterfall... This young woman was supposed to have been a “Player” of this game; however, now, even if she could be considered to be “inside” the game and just as stuck as they were, she still came from an outside world, seemingly with different rules. Could it mean that she had similar abilities as the ominous NPCs he had met? She certainly had the “inside knowledge” that was this enough? Did the universe, in some way, treat her differently due to her intrinsically different nature and origins? Did she already ponder these questions and use or “unlock” these abilities in some way...?

“Is something on your mind?” He jerked his head towards the source of this question. Alphys was already cringing as she was asked this knowing full well how empty this question was. Feeling unable to find any better words...
staring at him with a dorky smile. She immediately felt the need to specify: “Apart from, you Everything.”

That second question provoked a stiff change. “…You could say that again.” he admired.

“Just a few hours ago, I knew nothing. And now, here I am. Following you, in this insanity. After learning last month was a video game, realizing a lie, and nothing in our life matters.”

“…Yeah. That.”

She nodded before talking. She said something, but it was cut off. She kept nodding for maybe a bit too long. It stopped. She pursed her lips. The silence was uncomfortable. She didn’t like the silence. She needed to say something, to break the silence.

“Who needs problems to keep your mind busy with a world like this, am I right?”

A pause.

“…Pretty much.”

Then again… As much as he wished to avoid thinking hard about anything anymore, he found his mind wandering among random thoughts and memories, like a bullet train careening inside a crumbling railway station.
magic bullet they were riding. And as he reminisced, like he was forgetting something important. Imagining the past few hours flew by, and as the idea got to him that he had very certainly forgotten to say something important, somehow he found the dimmest energy to do these memories a decently-thorough search for clues. The flower, the main plaza, the party at his pub...

The party was the closest he had ever been to things for as far as he could remember. This also reminded him that at the time, something had caught his interest instantly: he had brought his trident in case of... Well, upon entering... the King’s eye was kept on something...

... Did anyone see what was under his cape?

“.........Asgore.” he sputtered spontaneously.
“Don’t remember if I specifically mentioned it, but when he arrived Snowdin, he brought something with him. And if that’s what I think it is. None of us are going to like it.”

My poor friend... This must have been quite the shock for you. There clearly are some matters at work... far beyond the level of comprehension.”
Asgore, along with this poor innocent yet terrif-
bystander, had witnessed in the span of a single
more unexplainable behaviors, twists and phen-
than he had previously in most of his life.
Teleportation. Conspiracy. Treason. Unknown
other forces of unknown nature, used to foil him
trusted subjects and friends, turning their in
against their kind, and against common sense all

“If, by any chance, you also wit
the human that caused us so much
Please, let me know. Did you see
clues that it could be the same or

“.......... I h-heard them talking
Undyne. It sounded like they knew ha
While unable to explain the reasons as
the shy ghost saw their only chance at finding
through stating the facts that they had directly w
and knew were true without a doubt. Was this h

“T-they knew my name, too. I thin
The King welcomed these clues with a cold, ashar
silence. Unable to face his informant, he turned
slowly and took a deep breath.

Before his eyes laid the exit of Snowdin’s main t
the beginning of the long walk to the entranc
Waterfall region. Could he even be certain that this way, instead of the other one? Mysterious, teleportation meant that he could not rely on any types of hints or samples to trace back. No scent. Not even a magic signature for maybe miles around. Who knew, maybe this non-magical kind of teleportation had broken through the secrets of the Barrier, at least. Maybe they were running on the Surface by now, their limited kingdom’s jurisdiction and power...

The poor ghost appeared shyly in the corner of his vision, unobtrusive and anxious. They were already prepared to apologize for their boldness and excuse themselves. The poor soul... Such traumatism it should have witnessed a human so brutally. Especially after they had come with the intent to help and the fear of seeing the true nature of a landslide accident...

“Please pardon my lack of respect. I hope you did not take it personally,” he muttered with a small, sad smile. “I am grateful for your answers; they are of utmost importance. You can go with peace in mind, my friend. As for me, I may need a moment.”

Napstablook bowed, or nodded, depending on possible interpretations his evasive but deeply...
Heavy footsteps landed in the snow with concern and weariness, but also with patience and regal wisdom.

Asgore, the King of Monsters, turned around to address one last polite smile at the subject who had graciously brought him to his destination; and hurriedly yet kindly, he offered the ferryman some gold coins from his pocket.

Aaron blinked at the unexpected gesture, but gladly accepted the tip and thanked him gratefully. Maybe he would have thought of adding a wink at the end of his sentence, but he restrained himself when he reasoned that it probably would have been inappropriate.

“Should I wait for your return?”

“No, no, it is alright.” the king assured. “I would not want for you to stay in the cold for this long. Besides, you must have some more important matters to attend to in Waterfall, do you not?”
As an answer, the semiaquatic monster merely gave a slow, respectful nod; then, after bidding the King a safe trip to the town, he let his boat drift off the coast and glide along the current, back towards his home area.

Asgore took a deep, freezing breath. No going back.

His steps left heavy imprints in the snow, but the fog made him unaware of this fact and would have rendered it useless to anyone trying to follow his tracks from a distance. Was the fog always so thick and opaque, though? As clear as the air was near the river, it quickly became difficult to distinguish anything but ghastly silhouettes after hardly one minute of walk inside the lands.

It was fortunate that he had a good memory of the place’s layout, even after spending more than a month without visiting it. The outlines of the main town soon appeared before him, exactly where he expected them to be.

Strangely, but also as one could expect, his arrival followed the exact same routine as his previous visits had installed.

More than half of the town’s inhabitants had vanished since his last visit; yet, somehow, in this instant, it almost appeared as if nothing had happened at all. As if the presence or absence of those now long gone in the crowd welcoming him had never mattered in the first place.

Just as stated above. It was eerie; but largely foreseeable. You always welcome your King the same way, after all; no matter the pains your people have suffered.

This is a part Asgore wished he did not have to see. Certainly, seeing his people suffer was a sight he could hardly bear; but seeing them hide their pain from him and welcome him with looks of surprised awe and rushed cheers because he was coming unannounced… was worse than anything. His people cared for their King so much.

They deserved a better King. They had needed a protector, and in times of need, where was he? He had not heard their cries of help until it was far too late.

After he had let his people down so harshly and with such dire consequences, how could they still support him?

This was why he was now present in this very town.

Mind you, he could never fix his mistakes, nor fully atone for his past crimes. But, hopefully, he could give his people the protector they so desperately needed.

And if what he had been told was true, a protector was required to attend to his duty in this very
moment.

“Welcome, Your Majesty.” a monster formally saluted him as soon as he stopped in the middle of the village square. “What can we do for you?”

As per usual, the burgundy haired frog-like monster already had pen and notebook in hand, and, unsurprisingly, a lit cigarette around (Asgore pretended not to have noticed her throw it away as soon as she had seen him). No matter the event, she was always the first to know; rather fitting for the woman whose primary occupation was to share the news to the rest of the Underground.

“Ah, Lady Garf. I am glad to see you here.” he returned the greeting with all honesty. “I need you to gather the neighborhood and maintain the crowd calm, if possible. I am afraid the news I was given cannot wait for an article to be written and distributed; not when it can be given firsthand.”

Not wasting a moment, his subject swiftly but respectfully nodded, before following his request without question. In an instant, the woman had started running around strategically and calling out to every monster she met, gathering a majority around the plaza and ordering the most athletic and influent of the remaining citizens to help her warn everyone else. The efficiency of her organized actions proved how much she knew both the town and its inhabitants like the back of her hand, and with how much precision she was able to put this knowledge to good use.

Seeing her in action, the King couldn’t help but chuckle at the idea that the infamous “number one word-search creator (and solver) in the entire Underground”, besides being the champion of crosswords, could also be the master of crossroads…

… It sounded funnier before he actually put it into words. Tori would have found a much better way to make this play of words actually amusing.

In less than ten minutes, the entire small town in its near entirety was present on the plaza and ready to listen.

“My dear friends,” he started, “I have gathered you here because I was warned of a potential danger. Now, I do not wish to alarm you; but if the dire news I have been given are verified, you must be prepared to defend yourselves.”

Asgore couldn’t help but maintain an anxious moment of silence, reluctant again to actually reveal said “dire news” for fear of causing an uproar; panicking could only worsen the situation, after all. He trusted his people and knew that they were aware of this fact, and he knew that the trust and teamwork capabilities of his subjects had saved them all during multiple past events; he had always been grateful to realize times and times again how ready they were to handle most emergencies…
But a merciless human child was not “most emergencies.”

His people were at the edge of their nonexistent seats. He could not bear to make them wait any longer.

“I have been told…” He took one last deep breath. “that a human has been spotted in this area.”

A wave of gasps and quickly repressed cries of shock resonated in the crowd; but soon the heavy silence came back and took over the last few voices who ever dared break it in the first place. The King saw parents shielding their children, monsters exchanging mutual glances and looks of fear… But the murmurs quickly died down, and soon all eyes were turned once again towards him.

His subjects were so much stronger and wiser than he could ever wish for. Here he was, lacking faith in those who consistently put all their faith in him… What a king he was. He was so proud of them, and all at the same time, so ashamed of not being able to live up to their greatness.

Lady Garf was the first who dared take a step forward and break the silence; despite all the respect she maintained towards the main figure of authority, she felt the need to question his claims nonetheless:

“Please pardon my doubting, but that is impossible.” she stated with as much confidence as she could muster, but with a tone that nonetheless betrayed some part of irrational denial. “How could a human be here? Wouldn’t we have seen it through the cameras?”

Well, thank you for your words, but we all expected this kind of defense to come from someone else. Now, what could he be doing…? Oh, there he is.

Finally, Grillby walked out of his pub at a fast pace and joined the commotion, as if somehow he had managed not to notice it sooner. Then again, this is what most observers would have thought; the keenest eyes could have spied him surreptitiously pocketing his cell phone a split second before he left.

Since he had missed the beginning of the conversation and hardly anyone around him payed any attention to his late arrival, nothing stopped the ongoing debate and soon another monster advanced from the crowd to add his own thoughts:

“There’s one right at the exit of the Ruins and another in the main crossroad!” an orange demon-like monster supported. “Even if they managed to avoid the cameras in the area, there is no way a
human could have gotten past the one filming the Ruins’ door without being seen.”

“I can confirm that.” a scarfed mouse went in. “I’ve been keeping an eye on all the cameras in the area, and nothing’s changed. Nobody went out of the Ruins.”

Asgore maintained his silence, but gave a weak, somewhat reassured smile, and nodded slowly. It seemed as if this information and simple contradiction could by itself be enough to convince him; and, after all, who did he trust more? His subjects, of course. Especially the ones who knew the field and lived in it more than he did. What he heard was still a mere rumor, after all; nothing more.

Still… Soon a rabbit teenager offered a new theory when he cried in realization:

“Wait a minute! So, if no human could have fallen through the Ruins, but someone DID see one, then...”

The deduction clicked in everybody’s minds all at once. There was one possibility for a human to have avoided the cameras: if it just so happened that the human already knew of their existence, at least regarding the ones stationed in the rest of the Underground.

The one located at the entrance of the Ruins ensured that it was completely impossible for anyone to enter or exit the Ruins without being spotted, since it was the only way; but it did not prevent a different scenario. It simply involved the premise that instead of a freshly new human…

The rabbit’s dark implications were not only uttered with a shuddering voice, but they also quickly caused an uproar in the rest of the crowd. Cries of “They were here the whole time!”, “What if it wasn’t actually dead?” and “We’re doomed!” resonated all around the dumbfounded King, who desperately tried to bring his audience back to its previous state, quiet and ready to listen, but who failed to do so for at least twice the time he would have wished.

Grillby’s darkest theories were confirmed as he realized that Asgore’s presence was far from coincidental, but that instead, he already knew.

Part of him felt like he should care more than he felt in this present time. He did worry for that teenager, and he certainly worried for Sans, but… Maybe he just didn’t know the full extent of what truly was at stake. They were supposedly stuck in a time loop, after all; maybe this one… just wasn’t the right one? Sans would still have the next time to try again, wouldn’t he?

Obviously, he did not wish for that to happen. He did not even have the slightest idea of what would happen to every single person he knew if this timeline did not end well. It had been implied
that the universe would simply rewind itself due to the game’s influence, but what if things went differently, unbeknownst to everyone?

This timeline had to be the right one. He really, really hoped it could still be. But then... How could anyone get past Asgore? Was this the moment to let the truth shine? Did he have any chance to convince anyone at all...?

“Now, now, please remain calm!” the King ordered for the umpteenth time. Thankfully, this one was successful. “We are all afraid of what could happen if these rumors were true, but panicking will only lead us to our doom. I am here to shed light on these claims. You all know the saying: prepare for the worst, hope for the best. Please stay calm and ready to defend yourselves... But do not give up hope. Whether a human is hiding here or not, whether it is the same human as the one from last month or not... I can assure you that I will ensure your protection. Your fear is justified; but do not let it consume you. Last time, the human took us by surprise. Now... Maybe we can ensure the advantage of the number.”

This was bad. Really bad.

“Now, if any of you have seen anything out of the ordinary recently, no matter how small; please do not keep it secret. We should gather as much information as we can get.”

“I believe Sans has been staying here on multiple occasions during the past few weeks.” Lady Garf reminded. “He has been staying here the longest and I trust that he is quite observant. If anything happened in our absence, he is the only one who could have noticed it.”

... Aaaand he should have held that thought for a bit longer. Things could always get so much worse in just an instant.

He dared pray that none of his neighbors would mention...

“Speaking of him, didn’t he get in an argument with Grillby or something?”

... The Angel really had deliberately cursed his luck today.

“Well, I don’t know if you were arguing, but it almost looked like it earlier.” the orange demon quickly corrected his statement, but he was still deeply puzzled. “I thought I even saw bullets at some point?”

Thankfully, Grillby had anticipated that last question and prepared a hopefully somewhat plausible excuse. “Oh, right. In fact, Sans was looking for a sparring partner; after spending so long in his
basement with nobody around, who could blame him for wanting to exercise with a friend?”

Well, admittedly, he should have expected the rows of widened perplexed and skeptical eyes to target him in sync after saying something as ridiculous as this.

“Sans? Exercising?” A pair of eyebrows raised almost a full inch above their usual location. “Now I’ve heard everything.”

“Well, I never saw him practice,” another went in, thankfully in his defense this time, “but if the rumors are true and he’s really the one who stopped the last human, that must’ve come from somewhere, right?”

“I can confirm that the last human is very dead, and that only Sans was present at the time. I participated in the investigation and wrote the article, after all.” Thank you, Lady Garf. Thank you.

The first monster hesitated, but then he nodded, visibly satisfied with this justification. “That would explain it.”

This went a lot easier than he had hoped, and he certainly would not complain. Maybe there would not be any real need for the truth to come out just yet, in the end.

But then… A child’s voice echoed from the back rows of the crowd, indignant and distrustful.

“If it’s dead, where’s the soul?”

The child was quickly silenced by one of his parents, but the seeds had been planted. The burgundy haired woman repeated that the human had been certified to be “undoubtedly dead”, but this was not enough as an answer. Some murmurs started to argue that Sans could not realistically have had the power to kill a human anyway when everyone else failed. Others responded that if that had not happened, then how could Sans still be alive, and the human missing; unless, of course, Sans could have for some completely stupid reason faked the human’s death before taking it in.

This last conspiracy theory was so undoubtedly absurd that it sounded largely stupid enough to work, some whispered.

“The human’s body was retrieved and buried long ago.” the King thankfully confirmed. “I would
have personally noticed if they somehow were still alive and escaped their coffin.”

This quickly tamed the crowd and silenced the last claims.

“I came after hearing the smallest of rumors, because I did not want to take any potential risks. However, as Lady Garf demonstrated, it appears that not only the last human cannot be a threat anymore, but that it is impossible for any other human to have made their way in the Underground at all.” he continued. “As such, my advice still stands. The rumor may be false today; but do not forget it. One day, it may become true.”

Various gestures and words of agreement resonated in the crowd, reassured and confident. Asgore took a deep breath before apologizing for coming and scaring his subjects in vain, but nobody held him responsible. On the contrary, many offered to let him stay for the celebration they had planned for the evening, or to just host him for the time of tea and various refreshments before his leave.

Seeing here his perfect opening for a perfect distraction, naturally, Grillby offered everyone present to take said refreshments at his pub; thankfully, the main target found the idea charming and generous, and once the King has agreed to something, nobody will voice any opposition.

A good dozen monsters followed behind him as he walked back towards his eponymous building, the King included. He took the orders, and as soon as he reached the kitchen, he pulled his cell phone from his pocket and typed:

[ TO: Sans — 03:27 PM ]
False alarm he doesn’t think there’s any human here anymore. I’m keeping him and others busy.

Good. That should do it.

Now… He just had forty-seven orders to take care of. He was so fortunate his interns were still here to help.

“... Please pardon my indiscretion, but did you say something about Sans?”

Asgore gave the fire elemental the brightest, most blissfully oblivious smile the world could ever create.

“Why, yes. I was just saying that I will certainly pay him a visit, while I am here. Alphys told me that she also intended to join him today! It would be the perfect opportunity to salute their efforts.”
“............ Certainly, Sire.” he nodded.

Grillby, who had previously sent multiple texts to keep Sans updated on the situation, promptly went back on his previous texted claims that they were in the clear.

[ TO: Sans — 04:13 PM ]
NEVERMIND HE’S COMING

“... It’s still Asgore. He’s a softie. Right? Isn’t there any way we could, just, tell him everything? Couldn’t you guys find a way to let him in on this?”

The nervous laughs Dawn obtained were enough to let her know that, no, they could not. Part of her wanted to ask for some actually worded and detailed explanation as to why, but she quickly rationalized that, no matter how frustrating it was to remain stuck in her state of confusion, there were much more pressing matters at hand.

“okay. anyone got actually feasible ideas?”

Although the skeleton’s question seemed to be addressed to both girls present, the conversation he engaged was clearly meant to evolve between the two monsters and ignored the human’s presence almost entirely.

“She can’t stay here.” Alphys assured, stating what was supposed to be obvious to her in order to give the brainstorming session a stable start. “He’ll find her for sure, sooner or later.”

Her only answers were a pair of raised eyebrows from Dawn’s part, and a firm nod from Sans’s. So she continued:

“I can take her somewhere else while you distract Asgore.”

“That’d be cool, thanks.”

He stopped his pacing to close his eye-sockets and concentrate for a bit, and just a few seconds
later, he opened them again and threw whatever object had mysteriously materialized inside of his
hand that was definitely not there a minute ago. A bit surprised at first but repressing it just as
quickly, Alphys raised her clawed hands and caught the item without flinching. Only then could
Dawn realize that it was a set of keys.

Sans only had one more thing to say:

“third one on the left of the rocks.”

There was a sharp nod. The lizard scientist was obviously not going to question anything regarding
this whole thing, from what these keys were for to how Sans had acquired them or whether or not
he had just stolen them from someone else. Priorities, probably.

“We’ll see you later.” she assured gravely. “You know the place.”

Dawn looked up from her phone (she had been distracted for a few seconds when she had realized
that after her WhatsApp call with her brother, the message she had tried to write to her friend had
been sent as it was, whether before the call or right after it ended due to her mistakenly pressing a
few more buttons in her panic). One distraction leading to another, she dared ask candidly:

“… So we’re going somewhere, but without you?” she addressed Sans in confusion. “Wouldn’t it
be faster if you just, teleported us there?”

“it’d sure be faster, but. two things.” And he raised two bony fingers to support his point. “i need to
stay here when he comes and probably cover for alphys as well, and i need to stay behind because
if something goes wrong, i’m the one who’s more likely to catch up and find you.”

“Also, there’s no way we’re leaving you without supervision where we’re going. Game or not,
you’d get lost in no time and it’d take hours to find you.”

The teenager wanted to ask the most obvious question, that was to say where they were going, but
the scientist merely took her arm and pulled her towards the kitchen while saying that they had no
time and needed to leave immediately.

“Oookay, so later then?” she tried to send a quick wave to Sans, who simply acknowledged it with
a lazy but concerned nod.
“yeah, good luck. and al?”

“I’ll keep you updated.” she assured, waving her phone as proof.

“great. i prolly won’t read your texts while he’s here, but i’ll try.”

And with that, the kitchen door closed behind them.

Dawn wondered why they were entering the kitchen of all places, while they were supposed to leave the house, but quickly the solution to this inconsistency offered itself under the form of another inconsistency: here laid, in a corner, a back door that led them to a narrow snowed path hidden by a row of large, dark pine trees.

So here was that previously mysteriously missing access to the back of the house, after all. But why was it linked to the kitchen? The game only ever made a connection between the hypothetic back door and Sans’s basement.

That was… weird. Was the game making it a shortcut between the back door and the workshop by hiding the more complex path she would need to follow here, by entering the kitchen and exiting it to take another door under the stairs in the living room? She wondered.

Maybe it was all a trick of perspective. She had found out that the mezzanine in the real life version of the house could easily access the balcony on the upper floor, after all. The game made it absurdly impossible for some reason.

Either way. Dawn tried to bury her head inside her shoulders as if it could hide her face, as she kept following her yellow friend. Thankfully, it appeared that she knew enough the area, or they were just lucky to never meet anyone else. After a half minute of fast but quiet walking, the two girls reached the first area devoid of trees…

And most importantly, they reached water.

The first surprise was that instead of meeting a single hooded figure standing on a lonely boat, there was no living soul in sight, and about a dozen docked boats left without supervision. A look to the side of the land, and Dawn spotted a wooded cabin with a large sign reading simply: “boat rental.”

Well. That was self-explanatory.
“Quick, it’s that one.” Alphys whispered as she silently dashed to the ship she was pointing to, the set of keys firmly kept inside a tense fist.

There was no objection; in an instant, they were both near their target and Dawn hurriedly but carefully stepped in. At first she thought that this place was supposed to be the Snowdin spot from which the River Person would take Frisk, but a more thorough look at the surroundings and a better analysis of the path they had taken from Sans’s house convinced her that instead, this had to be an entirely different location; one that was, fascinatingly, supposed to be completely inaccessible to the player — not only by being unreachable, but by being entirely impossible to notice even by staring at the boundaries of the game’s map.

All things considered, it was undoubtedly cool that she was now able to access parts of the map that no player even knew existed.

While Alphys took the commands at the front (instead of a mere wooden boat, this one was apparently motorized), the human took cover under a tarp that somebody had conveniently left there, whether by chance or by the result of Sans shenanigans. When she noticed, the lizard lauded her smart move with a short hum of approval. Hardly a second later, Alphys turned the key, and they were off.

Never had she imagined that there could be more than just one boat in the Underground; most fanfictions she had read only assumed that, just like in the game, there only ever was one boat and one River Person in the entire cave. Then again, not only having more boats for everyone’s daily trips made more sense, but in this very moment, they were very fortunate that they could find their own; they wouldn’t have to walk in the open for much longer.

As much as she enjoyed the idea of walking through and discovering the Underground in all its details, now was simply not the time. Besides, what she had quickly learned from her small hike the day before was that the last portion of the Snowdin area that would lead to Waterfall was not only much longer than the game made it look, it was also devoid of any place to hide if they so needed. Being able to bypass most of the dangerous parts of their trip was a blessing.

Dawn was very, very tempted to look out and admire the outside world while they were sailing through it; but the more rational part of her mind reminded her to keep her eyes below the blanket and to focus her efforts on being as still and invisible as she could. Her life could very well depend on it, after all. Tourism would be for another time.

After what felt like an eternity, the silence was broken beyond the simple growls of the motor sloshing the calm water.

“We’re entering Waterfall. You’d better grab something steady and brace yourself.”
Brace herself? For what? Dawn couldn’t see it, but Alphys pressed a button, and the consequence this mere gesture had was what let her gather new clues regarding the answers she was seeking: the boat shook wildly for a few instants, and although it soon came back to a stable path, it appeared that it was not relying on any solid ground anymore. Unable to stop her curiosity and confusion, the teenager gave up and peeked a tiny glance out of the tarp.

Soon her eyes doubled in side.

“We’re *FLYING*…?!”

Although she had managed to retain her exclamation to the level of a shocked whisper, the lizard shushed her hurriedly, and she apologized for her momentary lack of prudence and discretion. Thankfully though, her scientist friend still found the time and opportunity to explain.

“News flash, in case you hadn’t noticed: Waterfall has waterfalls. Everywhere. It’s completely impossible to navigate with a regular boat, especially if we want to get to the third floor.” Alphys couldn’t help but turn a smug grin towards her interlocutor and add: “Looks like the game doesn’t show you everything, after all.”

No. No, it did not.

“I never imagined you’d know how to fly something like this…” she confessed.

The lizard repressed a snort as if she had heard the stupidest of assumptions.

“And who do you think built those rocket-fueled babies? Santa?” she laughed proudly. “… Well, I just invented the idea. I didn’t build all of them.”

Dawn pushed her head just high enough above the tarp to send her a full look. “Dude. That’s amazing.”

“… Undyne wanted me to design them with sails acting like wings, like in those movies with pirates and flying ships or something.” She repressed a bittersweet smile. “That would’ve been a lot cooler, but absolutely impracticable. Too bad we had to settle for regular rockets instead.”

Oof… Not the best timeline to reminisce, huh?
“… If it can make you feel better, boats with rockets are still super cool.”

Alphys shrugged slightly, but she was already turning her back to her and fully focusing on the commands. “Haha, thanks. It doesn’t mean I have a lot of experience maneuvering them, though. So bear with me.”

The human nodded and ducked again, pulling the tarp back in front of her so she could go back to full stealth mode.

“Still, if you don’t mind I, uh, didn’t ask before, but— where are we going exactly? Is that a place I know?”

The monster took a minute of silence before she looked around them, ensuring that nobody was anywhere nearby.

“If I say ‘Garbage Dump’, does that ring any bells?”

Oh. That suddenly made a lot of sense. “Oooh. Yeah. I probably should’ve seen it coming, in retrospect.”

Of course the best place for hiding, if you had Alphys on your side, was going to be the Dump. The game assured that she knew the field like the back of her hand, and it wasn’t hard to imagine that this kind of place would be full of hiding spots. If she had allegedly taught Bratty and Catty how to search the place and find the best junk and gone on field trips with them on various occasions, it was pretty telling that in this present situation, going to such place was going to give them a very serious advantage.

That, and, given how this was the first place Alphys would think of bringing Frisk to during their mock-date and according to what her lab entries claimed, this simply was her favorite place to hang out, period. She should have been able to predict that this would be the destination she’d choose for their (hopefully temporary) escape.

After a long, almost silent wait, the boat touched solid ground once more. The lizard invited Dawn to carefully get out of her hiding place and follow her, and she obliged without a word. As soon as she jumped out, she realized why it felt like the boat had indeed reached solid ground: just like the game showed it, the area was submerged, but all at the same time, there was hardly enough depth to the water to reach her knees. The water was cold and dirty, but that was exactly as one should
expect from this place.

Overall, the one thing the game had preserved was what allowed the scenery to look so innocently casual and almost as beautiful and entrancing as the rest of the locations in the Underground; but now that she actually was standing there instead of looking at it from the distance of a screen, reality was quick to remind her of the reason why this was called a garbage dump:

It was, obviously, filled with garbage. Her nose was very quick to catch up with that fact.

One thing she found herself thinking about was that monster food was known for being of magical nature, granting it with many advantages; one of which was that it would never spoil.

But, then again, where did all that garbage come from? Humans. And regular matter, contrary to magic, was pretty sensitive to the various chemical and biological reactions induced by either the dioxygen present in the air, by microorganisms, and many other things. This… probably wasn’t healthy. Had she been vaccinated against tetanus?

Whether she had been or not (hopefully she was, she didn’t remember if it was one on the list of those required by the law but it could be), it was not like they really had a choice at this point. She was a human, and she needed to hide for a while. The garbage dump was, strategically speaking, a place where you could hide pretty much anything and then you’d have to spend hours to try and find it again. This was a plan she shouldn’t be complaining about, simply because it seemed like the best option they had for the time being. Her nose would have to suck it up.

She wanted to be the hero protagonist? She had to accept the cold reality of getting her hands, and probably more than just her hands, dirty. In the literal sense more than in the metaphorical one, in this specific case.

Still, she couldn’t help but wonder. She once heard that humans, like most animals, had their taste buds and sense of smell naturally attuned so that some of the most toxic and unpleasant compounds would taste or smell bad to them, as a warning and deterrence from consuming said compounds. She didn’t know whether it was true, but… Could it be that since monsters were not too easily ill, they did not have that problem? Or was it that Alphys’s not seemingly being bothered by the surrounding smell was just that she had scouted this place for years on a regular basis and was just used to it?

Well, she was stuck in this place and once they found the perfect hiding spot, she would need not to move for a while for the sake of stealth. Don’t judge her for trying to find distractions by pondering pointless questions.

“Here. That should do it for now.”
What Alphys was pushing her towards was the front half of what, in another time, had been a car. It looked very rusty, it was definitely never going to move again, and they would be very lucky if they managed to just open the doors by any means other than kicking them open with a battering ram at full force, but still: on the bright side, it was surrounded by random, tinier junk, and whatever laid inside was ensured to be very easily hidden from an exterior perspective. In fact, had Alphys not told her where to look, she would have certainly shot a glance without paying the car’s remnants any attention.

So. For hiding spot standards? This was the jackpot. They just needed to find their way inside somehow.

“Maybe we could find a crowbar around here.” the teenager immediately offered with confidence. Surely if they had found a car of all things, such a common and relatively tiny tool would be even easier to find in comparison.

Nonetheless, the scientist firmly shook her muzzle. “No need, I have better than...”

There was a light sound nearby. The girls fell silent and a complete stillness engulfed them. The light sounds resumed, but seemed to be far enough away so as to let them think that whoever they belonged to was not necessarily aware of their presence.

Still. This was a close call, and as such, some precautions needed to be taken.

Alphys pushed the human against the rocky dark wall in a corner, keeping a short but steady arm to block her way, just in case she would have thought of protesting or questioning her judgement. “Stay back.”, she said, as if her action were not enough to convey the message.

If the situation weren’t calling for it, Dawn would have mentally commented on how her serious expression and general demeanor were most probably inspired from the animes she was watching so much.

At least, such expression could only mean one relieving thing: she had a plan. And as an immediate confirmation to this, glowing smitherens started gathering inside the palm of the lizard’s other hand. A bullet? Only one...? No. Maybe it had to do with the fact that Alphys was hardly ever shown using magic by herself, but she definitely had something up her sleeve. Something effective.

In the game, Alphys was never explicitly shown using magic. The only visual clue was during her fight as a Lost Soul in the True Pacifist Ending, and during this short fight, she would use the same patterns as Mettaton’s.

What were the components of Mettaton’s patterns? Regular blocks. Lightning-shaped bullets.
Flying legs and retractable arms. Disco balls playing with cyan or white lasers. Tiny Mettaton bullets pretending to be Mary Poppins. And most importantly...

Bombs.

… Stay back indeed.

There was a deaf sound, and then a wall of rocks fell, rolling again and again, always creating more sound and dust. When it finally stopped, the room they were in was short one exit way.

“... Well. It looks like we won’t get out without Sans’s tricks, after all.”

… Which meant, according to what was just said, that there were now no exit left. One minus one meant zero.

There was still a narrow access to upper floors, and maybe even the actual Surface, if Dawn could trust the light she could vaguely see when she would look up in the direction where the waterfalls were coming from. Sadly, they probably did not count as properly accessible exits. On the bright side, though, it meant that at least they would not run out of oxygen to breathe. Assuming that Alphys needed to breathe oxygen, of course, which she could not be sure of. Monster biology was a mystery.

Upon looking a little further down the shallow water stream, Dawn saw a single waterfall that seemed to go down to a lower level, contrary to the other ones that came from the upper floors. After asking Alphys about it, though, it was soon revealed that this one would lead them nowhere and only get them even more stuck.

Thankfully, the plan for now was not necessarily to get out of the room. Just to find the perfect hiding place.

“So the plan is that I— we hide in the car. And then?”

She shrugged. “Let’s focus on getting in first, that’ll be a good start.”

The lizard approached the nearest door of the car wreck, then placed her hands close to the handle; small whitish glows appeared and tried to push through the barely noticeable opening between the door and the rest of the structure, but the result was going to be slow and tedious, at best.
About two minutes later, a frustrated pout started to make itself gradually evident on her muzzle every passing second.

She almost started to question whether the rust, or whatever other oxidized alloy that was, was starting to fuse and soldered the door to the rest instead of separating them. That, or it was just that she had a lot of trouble making her bullets both tiny and powerful. Either one or the other she could manage, but both at the same time was definitely trickier than she had anticipated.

Another minute, and a bar of solid metal suddenly appeared in her field of vision and violently stabbed the opening near the door. Apparently Dawn had found her long-awaited crowbar, after all.

“Okay. In my head, I had pictured things differently.” she sighed in disappointment.

“No worries. I mean, you can’t have all the glory.” the teenager joked with a playful grin.

Dawn stabbed the car once more, this time fully intending to lodge the bar inside the opening so she could force it open. The lever physics still required from her a stronger force than she had thought, but a combination of perseverance and elbow grease soon paid off.

“Don’t be too cocky.” Alphys smirked, although the corners of her mouth were a bit strained. “We both know Undyne would’ve been done with it in just a second.”

“She would’ve suplexed the whole car, you mean. Right? Maybe even the entire pile of…”

The human’s sentence was never finished, because as soon as she saw what she thought she had seen, her mind instantaneously forgot what she was about to say.

Alphys had blocked the only exit. They had assumed that due to this, aside from Sans’s shortcuts, nobody would be able to enter or leave the room anymore.

This assumption could not have been more wrong.

She instantly recognized that tiny shy ghost that looked like a white bed sheet with cartoony wet eyes, and the fangirl in her felt the immediate need to stupidly hide the crowbar behind her back and reassure the poor guy that despite their bad luck, they were not in danger:
“Wait, Napstab—!”

She froze and forced her lips shut, biting them as hard as she could. Alphys sent her the most betrayed and exasperated “Are you freaking SERIOUS right now” look she could muster.

She had to find a cover up, and quick.

“C-c-coughing! I-I was coughing! Y-y-y-you know, ‘Napstachoo’, that’s totally how it goes when you cough, the air is sooo stuffy in this dump and all that, nothing weird here, not like we could’ve ever met before or anything, hahaha, you’d know, right. COUGH COUGH.”

Alphys’s face-palm made it look like she was trying her best not to scream “Thank GOD this cringey terrible tirade of cheap excuses is over” in painfully angry relief. Napstablook stared with giant empty shocked eyes, their small mouth wide open but voiceless.

Then the poor innocent ghost became less and less opaque and vanished in half a second.

Dawn wanted to smack herself so hard right now.

“They didn’t buy it did they.”

The lizard scientist took a deep, deadpanned breath of disappointment. “Did you honestly think that even if they did, they would’ve stayed around?”

“… Touché.”

When will she ever learn? Whenever she opens her mouth to talk to someone new, she slips up. It’s only like, the third time around or something.

Alphys exhaled a harsh, disappointed sigh.

“Well, now we can give up on THAT idea for a hiding spot. Maybe even the whole room is compromised, now.”

“… I’m sorry?” the human tried to apologize. In the grand scheme of things, they had been
discovered long before she made her stupid mistake, and nothing could have changed that even if she had handled things in a smarter way; but still, they could have done without that second part.

The lizard merely brushed off her apology as irrelevant and unnecessary with a literal hand wave. “Just help me find a way out of here.”

Another quick glance at what used to be a walkable exit was enough to convince both of them that unless Undyne could be with them suplexing all those boulders, trying to clear the way by themselves would be both tedious and dangerous. Thus, by default, they only had a chance if they tried climbing the waterfalls and reached the upper floors.

Dawn wondered if the barrier was still in effect at this location; well, it most probably was, otherwise monsters would have thought of escaping through that entrance, but this only brought another question. Even if they reached the ceiling, would they find another way further in the Underground, or would the barrier be their only exit?

… She did not want to think about the dark implications of the latter escape scenario.

“Do you think they’re gonna tell Asgore?” she asked while trying to find the best waterfall to climb. One thing was for sure, the opening was too small for the flying boat, and probably too narrow for them to pass through. Given how stuck they were, nobody could blame her for resorting to wishful thinking.

“I don’t know who they’re going to tell, but they’re definitely telling someone,” the monster shrugged heavily. “And if that someone doesn’t end us first, they’re gonna relay the information to the top.”

While the teenager walked about, trying to climb or move random piles of garbage around, Alphys had soon stopped her own search and pulled out her phone, texting Sans frantically and asking him for news. She was not getting any answer, but this did not deter her from typing.

Thankfully, after more than twenty minutes, he responded. Except that instead of a message, he was actually calling:

“Did something happen?” was the first thing Alphys asked fearfully as soon as she picked up.

“things were pretty smooth before that ghost showed up and told us that after seein’ a landslide and comin’ to make sure that no one got hurt, they saw you tryin’ to smuggle a human in a car.”
Well, turned out that Napstablook went directly to the top, after all. Conveying the news in the span of half an hour was pretty fast, all things considered. Then again, they were a ghost. Phasing through walls made the trip shorter.

“Where are you right now?”

It was safe to assume that if Sans was talking to her so freely, then Asgore wasn’t around to hear them talking.

“waterfall. grillbs an’ i are on our way to the dump.”

There was one word in that sentence that most definitely did not belong in the context of ‘escape’ and ‘Waterfall.’

“Grillby’s with you?! When— how did that happen? And in Waterfall???”

“he came along with the ghost, i didn’t think it through and took him with me when asgore flipped, and we found an arrangement in the meantime. anyway, tell us where you are and we just might make it in one piece.”

“The Dump, L3 east.” Alphys explained instantly. “Just look for the cave-in where you’d normally find the access from the town.”

Whatever Sans replied to that, she retorted hastily after listening for just a few seconds, claiming that “It seemed like a good idea at first!”, that she had initially planned for them to make their way to “L2” but that they were busted before that, and that she had absolutely not anticipated that a single bullet from her part would do that much damage, let alone that it would get them stuck in that part of the Dump and that getting to “L2” would only make them even more trapped than they already were.

Dawn was only vaguely listening, as she continued to look around and search for anything that could be of any use in their current situation. She already had her recently found crowbar and she did not want to think of actively looking for weapons, but sadly, the more rational and pessimistic part of her mind reminded her that, first, this timeline was meant to be Reset at some point anyway, and second, that given the current circumstances, she did not really have a choice and had better get prepared to defend her life in every way she knew. Even though she really did not want to think of actually hurting anyone, obviously, let alone Asgore. Sure, he was the one who wanted her dead,
but… It’s Asgore. He’s a softie! One of the most adorable gentle giants in the universe… Besides, it was his job, but it wasn’t like he actually wanted to kill anyone, right? Was talking really out of the question?

Well, in the game, the “Talk” option could only do so much as lower his Attack after persevering for three turns. What did this amount to in regards of effectiveness, a fifty-fifty? Could she possibly call the “#2 Favorite Character” card and get a bonus for being part of his fanclub…? Hahaha. Just kidding. That was just some very fancy wishful thinking.

“Dawn. Sans says we should take cover. You’re gonna want to plug your ears.”

If the implications of what was to come should have been predictable to her, she did not have the time to realize them before they occurred right before her eyes. Merely a split second after Alphys confirmed on the phone that the way was clear, a ten foot diameter glowing and roaring beam made its way through the thick impenetrable wall of fallen rocks, obliterating every particle caught in its path until, after the light gradually toned down, all that was left was an almost perfectly circular hole, cleanly delimited by parts where the rocks had been either split or melted.

Through the other side, Sans quickly stepped on the bottom part of the hole, then jumped down to the girls’ level and walked to them, offering to help Alphys up. He willingly let the human to her gawking, preferring not to comment on her ungracefully hanging jaw.

“we need to move. any ideas where to go next?”

Alphys had felt his urge to make some random joke about how likely it was that his rescue attempt had awoken every single living (and possibly no-longer-living) soul in the Underground, but he had wisely decided against it for the sake of not wasting time. As such, she quickly offered Hotland as their next destination and followed him back through the hole, with the teenage human right behind her.

On the other side stood a giant, nearly six feet tall floating skull, with an innocently dumbfounded Grillby silently sitting on top with crossed legs, waiting for them without question. The skeleton quickly motioned Alphys to climb up as well, before doing so himself.

To Dawn, it finally hit her.

The always, ever rational and perfectly logical part of her mind finally woke up and, as usual, pretended that it had never fallen asleep by telling her how stupid she was for not figuring it out sooner. But still, the rest of her entire being pleaded with force and absolute indignation due to how outraged and offended it was that her rational part could ever be so unemotional and cold towards such obviously terrifying matter, just look at that thing, because holy mother of all flipping animes why was it so huge and deadly and oh so very realistically deadlike and—

“dawn, you waitin’ for the entire woshua clan to come and clean up the mess or what? ’cause they’re not comin, but soon the rest of the town will be.”

Well, there was his “my blaster woke up every living and dead soul in the underground” joke. Maybe he just couldn’t help it and needed to find one moment to break the tension somehow, after so much time and seriousness. Even if his joke’s only purpose was to remind the daydreaming human of said seriousness and of the urgent nature of their situation.

Dawn slowly and nervously turned her head to face him with a pair of distressed eyes, her neck trembling as if the rotation of her head had involved uneven gears forcing that movement to be split into various tinier actions, each step separated from the others by a sudden, painful stop. Her jaw opened a bit more than it already was, but no sound came out of it.

No no no – didn’t you see what it just did to that wall – you are NOT riding that thing – nope – never – not even if your life depended on it – which it does by the way – but still absolutely NOT – ONCE – EVER

Just before Alphys could ask the classic and overly clichéd “Dawn, are you okay?”, Sans remembered and realized the source of the problem all at once (besides the apparent problem that stood before them and refused to move for some incredibly stupid and suicidal reason). As a result, his disappointed skull became a little bit more sympathetic, but also ten times more impatient and deadpan.

“... please don’t tell me you’re havin a phobia episode or whatever it is you call it. you never had one after the first time and you said you’d be fine. please don’t start now.”

The only response that came out of the teenager’s mouth was a disharmonious voiceless suite of disembodied vowels, which could be translated with much effort to something along the lines of “sorry I swear I’m trying” followed by other beheaded words of similar meaning.

Grillby thought of this as the first opportunity he had to speak his mind:
“... A ‘phobia’? I don’t think I ever got to hear that one yet.”

Sadly for him, it appeared that his friend was not in the mood, as the only thing he uttered to at least acknowledge the question’s mere existence was: “long story.” Then, to Dawn: “look, i don’t know how bad it is, but we don’t have all day. can’t you just keep your eyes closed or something?”

Judging by the fact that the human’s eyes were shut at once and that she visibly tried to take a very deep and noisy breath, she was at least listening to him and clearly willing to help, and she most certainly would have actively worked on controlling her tremors and irrational fears all the same even if he weren’t here to urge her to. Still, the effectiveness of her attempts was, at best, debatable.

At least the rapidity of the process was, because after the mental countdown of five seconds (more like three and one quarter to be fair), the nearly one-foot-large cyan heart-like shape in her chest started to glow in a deep saturated blue hue; and then her entire self was magically catapulted from the ground with an acceleration that, during the very short amount of time needed to send her flying and landing in Grillby’s lap without either of their consent, became probably stronger than the limit fixed by her respectably absolute lack of g-force tolerance training.

Only counting on the bartender’s ability to keep his balance and ensure that his freshly handed baggage would stay grounded as well, not a single more second was wasted and the giant skull dashed away, hovering above water and land alike at high speed. Fortunately for his given mission of the highest importance (or unfortunately for him personally), the baggage was not an inanimate object but a living being, and soon the survival instinct kicked in and assisted him in maintaining the human in place. It was just a minor inconvenience that the solution she adopted was to take hold onto the nearest thing that was not magic floating bone, in order to do so while finding some form of comfort for her constant desperate terror. Under other circumstances, the rational part of Dawn’s mind would have led her to question how she could hug him without burning, or how it was possible to hug him at all; but it appeared that in this very moment, all traces of rationality were entirely gone.

The poor fire elemental tried to politely ask the human to let him go, but judging by the closeness of the embrace and the force she was putting in her (paradoxically) eternally shaking arms, one could only assume that she was too deep in her catatonic trance to do so much as acknowledge his words. Upon seeing the pain and shock distorting her fleshy face… Even without knowing the origin of such intense and unexpected reaction, the part of him that was a father could not help but feel at least the need to reassure this terrified child. Because, only then did he fully realize it, this was a child; she was older than his son, true, but even after knowing her for far less than a day, he saw enough hints regarding her young and naïve mentality.

He had never considered it before, but just like the previous humans (except for the genocidal
Before he realized it, his left hand went to rest on the human’s shoulder, as he tentatively rubbed his fiery thumb on her shirt. At first she did not move away, and instead tensed even more upon feeling his touch without warning; but soon the calming gesture and overall warmth of his presence slowly soothed her back to, if not reality, at least a more pleasant tranced state. If her embrace weren’t so humanly strong, he would have almost believed that she somehow fell asleep.

After a long moment of silent roaming, Alphys eventually called out to Sans and asked: “You said that a while ago already, but it’s been on my mind ever since, so… What did you mean exactly when you said that Asgore flipped out?” An ounce of skepticism could be seen in her voice and nonexistent eyebrows. “I could see him shocked and confused, of course. But angry…?”

Probably because Sans was too busy ‘driving’, Grillby decided to answer on his behalf; besides, contrary to his skeleton friend, he could provide some additional information that only he had been able to witness:

“Some citizens suspected that Sans was hiding the human from last month. We proved that it was absurd, but when this ghost arrived, I think they persuaded the King that these rumors were true…” The bartender held his thoughts and sentence for a fugacious moment, lowering his invisible gaze so he could send a subtle nod with his chin towards the fugitive semi-sleeping in his arms: “….. or that something similar happened, at least.”

Looking at this human, yet paradoxically innocent and seemingly harmless face, reminded him of how different this specific specimen was; of where she allegedly came from; of what this world allegedly was to her.

Thinking back of the phenomena he had witnessed the first time he was teleported in Waterfall… This young girl was supposed to have been a “Player” of this game; and even now, even if she could be considered to be “inside” of the game and just as stuck as they were, she still came from an outside world, seemingly with different rules. Could this mean that she had similar abilities as the ominous flower he had met? She certainly had the “inside knowledge”, but was this enough? Did the universe, in some way, treat her differently due to her intrinsically different nature and origins? Did she already ponder these questions and try to use or “unlock” these abilities in some way…?

“Is something on your mind?” He jerked his flaming head towards the source of this question: Alphys was already cringing as she was asking it, knowing full well how empty this question was but feeling unable to find any better words, and staring at him with a dorky smile. She immediately felt the need to specify: “Apart from, you know. Everything.”

That second question provoked a stiff chuckle. “…You could say that again.” he admitted. “Just a
few hours ago, I knew nothing. And now, here I am. Following you three in this insanity. After learning that last month was a video game, reality is a lie, and nothing in our life matters.”

“… Yeah. That.”

She nodded before talking. She said something obvious. She kept nodding for maybe a bit too long. Then she stopped. She pursed her lips. The silence was awkward. She didn’t like the silence. She needed to say something dumb to break the silence.

“Who needs problems to keep your mind busy with a world like this, am I right?”

A pause.

“...Pretty much.”

Then again… As much as he wished to avoid thinking too hard about anything anymore, he found his mind roaming among random thoughts and memories, like the giant magic bullet they were riding. And as he reminisced, he felt like he was forgetting something important. Images from the past few hours flew by, and as the idea germinated that he had very certainly forgotten to say something important, somehow he found the dimmest energy to give these memories a decently-thorough search for clues.

The flower, the main plaza, the party at his pub…

The party was the closest he had ever been to the King, for as far as he could remember. This also reminded him that at the time, something had caught his interest for an instant: he had brought his trident in case of need, but upon entering… the King’s eye was kept on something else.

… Did anyone see what was under his cape?

“..........Asgore.” he sputtered spontaneously. “I don’t remember if I specifically mentioned it, but when he arrived in Snowdin, he brought something with him. And if that’s what I think it is..... None of us are going to like it.”

“My poor friend… This must have been quite the shock for you. There clearly are some matters at work… far beyond our level of comprehension.”
Asgore, along with this poor innocent yet terribly unlucky bystander, had witnessed in the span of a single minute more unexplainable behaviors, twists and phenomena, than he had previously in most of his life.

Teleportation. Conspiracy. Treason. Unknown magic, or other forces of unknown nature, used to foil him. His most trusted subjects and friends, turning their intelligence against their kind, and against common sense all at once.

“If, by any chance, you also witnessed the human that caused us so much harm… Please, let me know. Did you see any clues that it could be the same one?”

“......... I h-heard them talking about Undyne. It sounded like they knew her...”

While unable to explain the reasons as to why, the shy ghost saw their only chance at finding the truth through stating the facts that they had directly witnessed, and knew were true without a doubt. Was this helpful?

“T-they knew my name, too. I think...?”

The King welcomed these clues with a cold, ashamed, tired silence. Unable to face his informant, he turned around slowly and took a deep breath.

Before his eyes laid the exit of Snowdin’s main town, and the beginning of the long walk to the entrance of the Waterfall region. Could he even be certain that they went this way, instead of the other one? Mysterious, magicless teleportation meant that he could not rely on any known types of hints or samples to trace back. No scent. No sight. Not even a magic signature for maybe miles around.

Who knew, maybe this non-magical kind of teleportation had broken through the secrets of the Barrier, at this rate. Maybe they were running on the Surface by now, free from their limited kingdom’s jurisdiction and power…

The poor ghost appeared shyly in the corner of his field of vision, unobtrusive and anxious. They were already about to apologize for their boldness and excuse themselves.

The poor soul… Such traumatism it should have been to witness a human so brutally. Especially after they had come with the intent to help and the fear of seeing victims of a landslide accident…

“Please pardon my lack of reaction, I hope you did not take it personally.” he muttered with a small, sad smile. “I am very grateful for your answers; they are of the utmost importance. You can
go now with peace in mind, my friend. As for me… I may need a moment.”

Napstablook bowed, or nodded, depending on the possible interpretations his evasive but deeply respectful gesture could inspire; then they were off, vanishing gradually by dispersing through the air, pretending not to exist… or becoming one with the cosmos, depending on your perspective and whether you saw the glass half empty or half full.

The king did not send them away with a lie. He did need a moment to recollect his thoughts… and make a choice.

Asgore buried a big furry hand under his cape, letting the cloth glide along his arm and in the cold wind. A keen eye could, for a fraction of a fleeting moment, spy the glow of six dimly reflecting colors, ready against his chest.

Read via Screenshots Here (full formatting but may encounter loading issues)
Nobody needed to tell Dawn that they had arrived at Hotland. Even if they had not specifically mentioned it out loud before going down the specially built stairway descending to the bottom floor of the entire Underground and even if she had been unobservant enough to notice a few direction boards laying around, the heat and the indication enough that they had arrived, as it grew weaker as soon as they reached the bottom of the stairs.

Dawn yet again wondered where those stairs came from and why the entrance to the Hotland region had been different from the game, but she reasoned that given how big the Underground was and how many new places she had got to see, she wouldn’t have put it past the players to more than just one access from Waterfall to Hotland. Maybe the path the players were supposed to follow was located somewhere else and she just didn’t see it.

The monsters had long thought during their ride from Waterfall about what their next place to hide should be. The laboratory, although being an arguably good choice, was sadly too obvious, since Asgore certainly knew that Alphys was part of the team. Grillby offered the flat his wife and son lived in, but that option
telling the truth to his family as well, and there was the risk that Asgore already knew he was helping.

After much debate, Mettaton’s Resort ended up as the winning location by default, due to it being debate’s least obvious choice, as well as a decent enough place on the long term. It had been long after following the robot’s misfortunate death, so the chance of meeting coincidental bystanders was nearly nonexistent, and if they arrived through a shortcut and left the room locked, this should leave no obvious trace of their visits and give them more time.

Sadly, the group was not granted the opportunity to test this plan.

Loud and slow stomping sounds resonated, some ahead. Everybody immediately stopped. To the absolute dismay, the Gaster Blaster materialized and started hovering above their heads. It soon descended almost reached ground level in front of them. The summoner silently ordered them to climb, sending her a wordless “this is not negotiable”.

She was slower than they would have all prefer, to her credit, she was still able to stand and apparently, her giant skull despite her shaky legs, and the assistance gained from Alphys and Sans gently but hurriedly brought her back to full strength. The entrance to the...
her towards her intended spot accelerated the pace to an acceptable level.

As soon as all four had taken their seats, the girl flew away from the ground and as far away from each other as possible, hiding in the shadows of the main cave. From there, they could finally see the source of so much noise.

They would have very well preferred not knowing.

Far away in the distance, but still tall enough to be noticeable, stood a gigantic creature. It was blocking the main path and slowly making its way towards Wa.

One glance was enough. They all recognized him.

They all understood what had happened.

Asgore was staring straight in their direction. The blaster dashed towards the upper floors. The king gave chase. His running was as fast as it could be.

“How did he even make it before us!?" Truth be told, there was no use for discretion anymore. Dawn could panic as much as she wanted.

“M-maybe he took the access to our capital through the marsh? I don’t know!" Alphys answered, just as panicked. “It’s the only shortcut! Unless he could somehow teleport through the whole thing, there’s no way he could’ve been faster than us!”
Cue the six sevenths of a god deploying a pair of wings and taking flight with all the grace and spell six-soul powered glory.

“I just HAD to say it...!” the lizard dep face-palming with deadpan savviness.

“...Well that explains the flying island Grillby muttered, with much less concern in his than he felt like he should have put. “Um... I nice meeting all of you, I suppose.

“we’re NOT gonna die.” Sans countered, gritting teeth and repeating various words with the intent of every mantra he knew. “can’t die. can worked too hard for this. not now. not this.

The three passengers exchanged sorry looks, all the same thing but not daring to say it out loud. If even one chance in a million to get out of this alive, then letting the only one who still felt every faltering ray of hope know that his opinion was by the others was the best way to blow it for real. Dawn maintained her silence, but the sadness in when she sent Alphys a desperate and question soon let the scientist guess exactly what she had.

“Don’t worry about time jumping o
this. By now, I’m positive that’s only real chance.” she whispered back.

“But he has six souls.” she trembled. “I’m supposed to be as strong as four of them, right? What if it means that he...?”

“He can’t.” she assured. “Monsters have proven to be completely unable of jumping, no matter how powerful. They had seven souls that’d make him a monster so maybe then something different happen... But he only has six.”

“you’re still in charge.” Sans concluded sharply resolutely, as he started to get annoyed at the length of Alphys’s explanation. “put that to good use... Yes. As much as it pained her to erase shared memories and friendships... It was now obvious that there’s no other choice left. She had to Reset.

So she closed her eyes, tried to focus, or meditate, calm and determined, and...

A giant hand engulfed more than half of their view and magic maneuvered the blaster in order to avoid it as it appeared that they had gotten away from ghastly white flames continued the assault, leaving four passengers with no other choice than to be brutally touched by the surface of world completely unknown.
bullets closing on them from almost all angles, or as to which one it was going to amount to at the end of the battle, depending on whether or not it was going to make a difference at all.

Alphys and Grillby stood up, one facing the real other focusing on one side, but they soon found keeping their balance due to the erratic trajectory of their means of locomotion. Thankfully it did not much their ability at generating and throwing the bullets, mostly with the goal of stopping Asgo reaching their target. Sans first tried to take part in the battle as well, but he soon found himself unable to and keeping steady control over his blaster’s direction the same time, and had no other choice than to focus on his driving.

As for Dawn... To be fair, contrary to what one feared due to how she had handled the trip in W, she was not stuck on the blaster as a trembling fi

Probably because she was seeing the monsters felt inspired to assist them; maybe a burst of adrenaline even made her forget her vulnerability, or made her realized that if monsters were fighting back, then she, was naturally expected to be more resilient than...
Still, it did not mean that she was all that useful. She was desperately looking around them for something she could use as a weapon or shield, only to find none. Further, she realized that it was not being a crippling mess of tears did not mean that she was fearless: in spite of her efforts, the environs of chaos and bone were no help to her abilities in thinking, and only increasing her panic and hopelessness.

Even when the skeleton summoned a long and sharp bone and provided her with a potential weapon of defense, she found herself with no other choice than to use it as a makeshift baseball bat and hope that what middling PE classes had taught her would be enough to save their lives. It was already a miracle that fire bullets had not acted like solid shapes that could be bounced off her.

This was when Sans realized a terrible reality: the human had not a single clue how to fight.

Never think you already saw the worst of your opponents; instead be ready for any surprises. Bullets can come from anywhere, but never turn your back on your own enemies. Don’t waste a single second, because every action counts.

Stamina is the key, not firepower. The list went on.

Needless to say, the club-like bone bullet did not work. The first bullet to hit it at an unexpected angle contorted it apart in the middle, and soon the entire last bone fell apart and Dawn was found holding nothing but...
Then went the next horde of bullets, hitting from below.
The blaster shook, more and more white smoke appeared and gathered around Sans as he was using more and more magic to hold everything in place...
Then another bullet hit, yet again from below.

The blaster burst into white nothingness. Then there was nothing but orange walls rising from the ground, speed, the sound of wind howling, and the silhouette of a deadly creature shrinking in the hellish fiery sky. For an instant, Dawn found herself thinking that it was a good thing even if Sans generated another blaster. Even if they survived the landing, which they reasonably could to how fast they were already falling by this point, they could continue fighting off Asgore’s bullets, for they had hardly been able to do so far due to how obviously powerful a six-soul powered Boss Morchio compared to regular ones, and compared to hers, Asgore would keep following them. They could not hide forever. He would just find them.

Her friends were falling to their death, and she wasn’t this the perfect timing if she wanted to return back to a more peaceful time? She was determined everyone their Happy Ending and save the world did not want to die right? So she figured, it’s time.
did not want to die, right? So why wasn’t this world?

Was she so stupid that she could not figure how a simple game feature? Was she so useless that of her, everybody would die, either forever something weird happened and the game Reset again, only to trap all the monsters in its infinite once again and ruin Sans’s plans entirely?

She wanted to go back. She wished it with all her heart.

How could this not be enough...?

She saw the gigantic paw of the almost-godlike (Omega Asgore? Photoshop Asgore?) approach below, ready to catch her. It was the end.

If not the sudden bright blue glow coming from it definitely was the jerk and sudden change in trajectory that pulled her back into reality and realize that Sans still had not given up. She looked and saw him falling beside her, with Alphys and further away; Sans’s hand and sockets were blazing blue magic, and when she saw that he was her towards him, she tried to reach out and extend hand as far as she physically could. Finally they touched, and they did not let go.

Sans looked at Alphys and Grillby, still falling and use their magic in various ways, but to no avail.

Sans looked down. The lava was close. Too close
There was no time. There was no choice.

He sent each one of his three companions a hopeless and apologetic look. He certainly wanted that he was sorry; but even if he had said it, no one would have heard him.

His sockets closed and the entire world disappeared.

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For her first shortcut, this certainly was disorienting definitely not what she would have expected. Instead of landing in molten blazing hell at an alarming speed, all of Dawn’s adrenaline was washed away when the howls of the wind stopped and she was suddenly in cold, dark water. Her body’s survival instinct was the only thing that allowed her to pull herself back to the surface and cough out all the liquid she had inadvertently ingested following the shock of finding herself in an entirely new location without warning.

Only when she could stand on her shaky freezing feet did she look around could she find Sans in pretty much the same position as her and fully process what had happened. But before she could have just as many questions to ask.

“Y-you sent us back in Waterfall?” ‘Why here places?’ and ‘We were there just a few minutes ago, what was the point of going back here?’ were to be her next questions, but the skeleton’s cold
was too loud, and even after it stopped, he couldn’t let her phrase these ones.

“i don’t know what happened— we were supposed to land in the hotel, but something came up,” he retorted hurriedly. “i couldn’t get past him like the barrier. but that…”

“So he interfered with your shortcut or something.”

“I don’t know, okay!?”

Sans pulled himself up with apparent difficulty. The girl walked to him warily and offered a hand to help him up, but he did not take it. She did not insist. Dawn looked around. No one in view. Her stomach was aching.

“W-what about…?” The names she had in mind would not make it on her tongue. It was too painful to say.

“don’t.” the monster snapped in a low, hoarse voice. A weird sound followed. It almost sounded like a howl.

“p-please… just don’t.”

He was panting. Maybe more than just that. I was trying to stand up, eventually he just gave up, sitting in the water and letting the cold liquid splashing loudly against him and submerging him up to his shoulders when he gave way. The human sent him alarmed and stammering, not willing to encourage him to at least go back to n
and dry ground, but unable to voice them and too hard. He pretended not to notice. Of course the kid would want to lead the action. Of freaking. Had she already forgotten how she had acted in of danger? Did she seriously think they still had a

There was a low, disheartened sigh. “why didn’t you try to go back yet?” he asked angrily, but with a chilling, nihilistic calm. Of course, deep in every human was the same. “afraid you’d make on something if you did? didn’t you get enough

Dawn’s jaw dropped in absolute incredulity, and of hearing this was so sudden and strong that she almost a full dozen of seconds before she could voice back. But when she did, she did not hesitate moment to say everything she had on her mind.

“Wh— Are you serious? Of course I tried to It’s not my fault if it just— doesn’t work! How you ever believe that I wanted to stay in that fighting thing!? We could’ve all died out M-maybe Alphys and Grillby already did!”

She could hardly believe it. How was this any of How could he accuse her of deliberately slowing down and putting them in danger? How could he think that this player mentality of wanting to do t
for the sake of seeing how far the rabbit hole could go, escaping the consequences would play here, we both cared for every single person involved, and the consequences were absolutely real for everybody, them, herself included? Was he for real?

“In fact, since you ask me why I didn’t Reset everyone, she stuttered breathlessly, “I can do the same why didn’t you teleport us all, with the bomb before Asgore exploded it in our faces? Huh?!”

“i can’t take that many people at once!” he in snapped back. “in fact, i’ve never taken more than one person with me at any time, an’ all the shortcuts all day have been wearin’ me down more than i’d like to admit. happy now?”

The teenager crossed her arms and furrowed her eyebrows in annoyance. “You could’ve just asked you know.” If he went out and called her child anything, that would take the cake.

As soon as the skeleton raised his skull and almost eye-sockets towards her, a seven-second-long contest began. For the first time ever, the human one who eventually gave in.

“I’m not gonna blame you if your shortcuts work that way’ or something like that,” she
work that way or something like that.” She and turned around. But immediately she again and pointed a dramatic accusatory: “As long as you don’t blame me for not figuring out how to do something that I literally haven’t been anything about and that I wasn’t supposed to be able to do until yesterday night. Talk about Guide Dogs. Well, flash news, I don’t know how easy it was for you to learn how to break the laws of physics, not for me. And don’t you dare tell me I ‘just try enough’ or whatever.” After a small pause, she sat up, although cynically: “Hey, here’s an idea! Want me to actually find out how to get us out of this mess, just tell me how it works! I mean, isn’t what you supposedly studied in a lab at some point...

“a goddam kid figured it out better than this. How hard do you think it is?”

“Oh I don’t know, since it’s so easy, you want some creative ways to kill me repeatedly and I figure it out from the afterlife? Maybe blasting face off will help you get this all out of your system.”

The girl’s last shouts echoed for a moment around the cave, but were soon engulfed in the surging grawls of rushing water. Only after hearing her own did she stop, first because she needed to catch her breath.
and then because she realized that maybe Sans the only one who needed to get things “out of his head” after all. Hopefully she had got enough stress out of him.

The silence persisted. After a few more seconds, I slowly went to the edge of dry land and sat down beside the skeleton. She realized that the place looked like the room where the River Person would be expected to appear; but once more, there was nobody in sight.

A few evasive looks were accidentally exchanged twice, although each would send their eyes (or pupils) in the opposite direction every time the other had noticed. It was stupid.

Finally Sans spoke up. “... i’m sorry i snapped.”

He took a second to take another deep breath and sighed again. “Too many things went wrong. I shouldn’t have blamed you for it, though.”

“Definitely not.”

She had initially intended to keep it at that, but found it to be too harsh for him. He had been thinking for way longer than she had, after all. She snorted out a laugh.

“... And here I thought you said you weren’t reading into it a bit too much. If you’re more mad at us than you’d want to tell me. Unless he was mad at humanity in general,
was yet another option.

There was a forced, strained and humorless
"you didn't even play. can hardly call you a'
at all. maybe it's just frustrating that i can
get a real one to mess with. which makes
even dumber 'cause everything here is even
your fault than for the others. i'm not even at

to get mad at you for anything game-re.
it's not like you chose to be the one picked

She cracked up a small twisted smile, beside her.
“Well, if it makes you feel better... I guess I
understand how that must feel like...? I
You go out of your way to get a player and let
know how much harm they’ve caused to ev
and especially you, and in the end, of all the gu
could’ve got, you get stuck with me.” She
hands lazily display her own self for em.
The silly gesture made her crack up again. “I g
is kinda unfair that you couldn’t get even a tim
healthy revenge done or something.” Not that
stopped him from trolling her all the same, to
She snorted again. ““Healthy revenge.” Can’t
I’d ever say something like that. Is that even a th
“sure you made that one up.”
“Totally did. Revenge is bad.”

There was another pause, filled first with shy and laughter, then with welcomed deep breaths on both. Maybe they really just needed to calm down and it seemed that where they were, maybe they least have some time alone to do just that.

After almost a full minute of silence and introspection, during which he examined their options, Sans eventually turned around and asked in a tiny voice:

“... um. are you sure you tried hard enough...”

Here came the face-palm. “UGH! Yes, I did. I totally jinxed that you’d ask that one, and even I said you would you had to ask it anyway.”

The monster shrank his spine in his jacket and about to mutter a fast apology, but he completely to say anything when, outside of the room but much than they would have liked, slow footsteps were. The two fugitives froze in horror, then Sans jump feet and they dashed around for a possible place or another way to escape, but none were available. Sans started yet again to worry... but after letting and panic flow through his trembling bones, he them leave him. What was even the point...?

“... we’re dead.” he concluded. “we’re all go.
... we're dead. he concluded. we're all, so
deader than dead.”

When the apparently lonely stranger made the
inside the room they were in, the exclamation
uttered was clearly not the one they had expected.

“THERE you two are! I’ve been waiting
all afternoon for you slowpokes.”

They stopped dead in their tracks. Without even
a single glance, they turned around in a single
synchronized motion; the human instinctively
pointing menacingly her trusty crowbar as a mean
defense to keep any assailant at bay, only to
realize that she had dropped it long ago and that similar
temporary replacement for it was gone as well.
basically pointed nothing other than a pair of en
that quickly reconverted into a ridiculous pseudo-
chopping gesture. As if she had ever learned actual
at any point in her life, instead of just being influ-
lousy movies that really want to see you die in bad
realizing that their tricks are not going to work in

Fortunately for them, the monster they encountered
or at least looked, far from hostile. In fact, it ap
be an old turtle man who barely just walked
whatever place he had been until then, pushing the
out of his way on both sides like an actor who is
out of his way on both sides like an actor who just steps in his way on the stage and past the red curtain, address the audience; from both sides of a certain It was the infamous Hammer of Justice’s time and he seemed to have absolutely no care in the his role and lines. Already blaming the protagonist being late on their cue? What does he think he’s

The old man took a short second to look visitors up and down, assessing the damage. Thought he sighed heavily. “You really did a number yourselves, huh? Betcha kids are lucky you made it this far.”

“G— What...?” Thankfully the teenager had learned her lesson and knew better than to start address him by name, for once. This did not pull her rational mind from entering a dangerous into a dangerous loop, however, as the same thoughts cycle hypnotizing rate: What the daunting heck. What the he even. How did he. Why was he. So many questions Brain not working.

“You folks wanna live or not?!” the monster hissed, opening more widely the path where he came from and motioning it impatiently. “Quit dawdling an’ get in there before anyone sees you!”
Well, given how resisting would have done nothing to generate even more ruckus and, indeed, enhance the odds of being discovered by someone else, Sans soon reasoned that, after all, *why the heck not.* They were already dead unless a Reset could save them; they could just as well wait in a calm. No matter how surreal this whole thing was. How could that old man possibly know they were *What* did he know exactly, for that matter?

On the other side of the heavy concealing curtain found Gerson’s shop: a dark, small cave room full old junk mixed with masterpieces from a different all intertwined in a disparity of eras and economies. Due to the anxiety of accidentally finding and the one of these relics scattered on the ground, they found themselves subconsciously scanning the ground for invisible obstacles along the way. The turtle rush from behind did not help, but it certainly accelerated the process and pushed them into a semblance of a living room in barely a dozen of seconds.

Gerson locked a door behind him, closing the view between the main shop and this room. Then he turned around and finally relaxed. Some

“*What’re you doing standing there*
a bunch'a typhas? Take a sit all right. Make yourselves at home. B'sides, you'll find something to your taste in my neat collection, wah hah.” Yet a befuddled look was exchanged, but the pair found an old sofa in the back and complied without a word of protest. Immediately the old man spoke again, while his face was hidden in the corner of a dark kitchen closet. “Tea or juice?” Sans finally found in him the courage to talk. “I—look sir, it’s nice of you to offer but we’re not interested. we’re kinda in the middle of something with the king wanting us dead and our friends probably about to bite the dust. looks like we already know about that part anyway. some

“Will ya know what, I felt it was something I knew good ol’ Fluffybuns would sooner or later. He’s had so much on his plate, the poor guy. An’ with that abomination...”

Dawn shamefully shrunk in her seat, looking down with chills running down her spine.

“Wasn't talking about you, young lady. I meant the one before you. What a thing that wasn’t human. I tell you
He rummaged some more through his cupboards.

"...Wasn't the first time it happened, either."

Somehow, the tone employed in that last sentence sent both visitors on edge. In what sense was he meaning it? Given how he didn’t seem surprised at all by their presence, who knew what he could be aware of or not.

"Younglings, I’ll ask you one more time. Tea or juice?" He wasn’t going to let that go.

Still, he kept searching and soon his tone was louder.

"Ooo, looks like I’ve got some cocoa in here."

Dawn jumped on that word without thinking.

"C-cocoa please?" she tried to ask politely, a small sheepish smile.

Gerson finally pulled his head out of the closest and eyed her for a full second of deep silence. Then, he laughed darkly. "Wah ha. Feeling fancy, are you used to the resources down here, aren’t you?"

The human blushed and timidly cowered as her embarrassment and guilt. Had she accidentally offered something that would be rare or expensive? Why did he offer it as an option? Was a wrong choice to take? Who did that... sorry, I didn’t realize it was... l-it’s okay, I’ll just..."
“Shhh, don’t you worry about it. That’s a special occasion after all.” he shot at her humorously, shaking his head slowly and chuckling in a deep voice. “Time will jump sooner, one way or another. Ain’t it’s gonna matter.”

Well. Here it was. He knew.

“What about you, young man?”

“O-oh, uh... tea please. I guess?”

“Good choice. You’re gonna need all the vitality given what’s to come, wah-ah!”

That... he had nothing to reply to except for a committal shrug. Dawn wondered if Gerson could be alluding to the “Sea Tea” consumable item’s ability to increase the consumer’s invisible Speed stat.

Still. Somebody needed to address the elephant in the room sooner or later. Now was as good a moment as any. The human gulped silently, trying to gather all her courage.

“So. Yer a human, huh? Heard you quite different from the other ones, specially about... a certain thing.

Not only had the old turtle beaten her to it, but he even had time to say anything, he was lazily re-
even had time to say anything, he was lazily prodding at her with a clawed finger at her chest and a dim cyan light from it in response, without her permission or consent. While the feeling wasn’t unpleasant, the fact that the magic grasp was somewhat hugging something located *inside* of her felt incredibly intrusive. It looked like she was the only one in the room feeling that way.

Maybe monsters saw it differently, but... shouldn’t the action of looking at other people’s SOULs without their consent be seen as *rude* or anything?

“*That’s quite an odd one you got there, kiddo. Clearly doesn’t belong here.*

Seriously, what was it with monsters showing up in the room just like that as if it weren’t a big deal? Esmée’s SOUL was supposed to be so allegedly “special”...”

Thankfully, right after having said his last sentence, he lowered his arm and released his grasp, and the dim light in her heart went back to stand invisible and immobile, much like a good little puppy.

“*Take *really* good care of it, will you? I’m afraid if somethin’ happens to you’re not the only one who’s gonna suffer. Far from it.*”

Yeah, and she really wished she could control all the weird stuff her SOUL was doing independently from...
weird stuff her soul was doing independently from it. For what was supposed to be the culmination of it, it sure sometimes acted like it had a mind of its own or monsters’ influence on it was just that impressive. Probably more by instinct than by conscious will, she went to shyly cover her chest, even after the girl hidden inside of it had disappeared from their view.

“Y-you have a l-lot to explain… sir.” she said defensively, refraining once more from calling by name. It was better not to assume that he was too much, since the more leads they were giving the more likely he was to become even more dangerous.

“H-how did you know? Who told you about us?”

There was first nothing but deep, enigmatic silence. Of freaking course. That old guy sure wanted every single “old wise man” trope in existence, or else.

Well, it was starting to get annoying. Did he want to help them or not?

“I’m afraid I can’t answer that.” he reluctantly answered, wearing an apologetic and sincere smile. “I get the feeling that source wouldn’t like it if I told you.”

Wait. A source? So someone else did tell him more than that, someone else knew!? “To be I’m sure you know enough to figure one out on your own, young lady.”
one out on your own, young lady.

What was he talking about? Who else could possibly be talking about their existence and secrets without even themselves known? It couldn’t possibly be Alphys Grillby, so it had to be someone who would have been stalking them since the start? But who could have the power to do that? Oh. Ooooooh. Oh please God freaking no.

“Flowey.” It hit her like lightning. Of course it was him. Who else could it have been? This was the only explanation that made sense and that was self-explanatory, given how many questions this was answering at once. “I-it. It’s him, right? H-he knows about us.”

“Whoa, whoa. Slow down. Who you talkin’ about?”

Dawn froze in horror. Just to be certain that they were not joking, she turned her gaze towards Alphys and stared at the lights in his sockets. When she realized he was absolutely serious, all blood drained from her face.

“Flowey is Asriel Dreemurr resurrected with a soul after Alphys injected a golden flower of determination. He was manipulating the time before Frisk fell in the Underground and there’s some debate as to what exactly happened between you two but it’s very heavily implied that timelines were returned to events before Frisk arrived.
timelines when he went out to kill everyone “caused him his fair share of Resets” and now avoids you like the plague and kinda acts like his archenemy. I think.”

Once her tirade was finished, she was not the only one in need of deep breaths. A dead silence overpowered the room, weighing on everybody’s shoulders. Sans’s sockets were wider and rounder than she had seen them, with shockingly small pinpricks of light in them. She finally took a single instant to process what she had done and said in the span of barely ten seconds and just how inconsiderate this had been.

“Ack— S-s-sorry...!” she hurriedly shrieked in panic.

“I should’ve broken that down to you more slowly,” she said with a guilt-ridden gaze.

Sans slowly and heavily blinked, but he quickly lowered his head and the guilt washed over him like a wave. “no... no. you did good. just... g-give it a minute to process that.” He closed his sockets and raised his face towards the ceiling while keeping his hands on his lap, taking a deep breath. After he lowered it again and buried his forehead in his nonexistent nose in parallel rubbing hands, he stopped his noisy breathing. “man that’s nuts. Good job, dummy. Best possible way to drop the...”

The human judged it wise to shrink down in her
stay as silent as possible for as long as her friend needed to recollect his thoughts.
Gerson chose this exact moment to fetch the other tea and distribute them. Thankfully the hot drinks would help all calm down and bring a bit more peace. As soon as he was given his cup of tea, he barely thanked the skeleton and immediately took a long, slow sip from it. For some reason it seemed to help and took effect in just a dozen or so minutes.

“... i’m, uh. guessing i’m still missing out on another important stuff, if that is supposed to be common knowledge to all of you.” the skeleton even muttered, slowly weighing his words. “i might do better if you were more cautious the next time. but if there’s other stuff i need to learn about, i’d be grateful if you could let me know asap.”

“W-well... I don’t know what you don’t know, you guys. Yeah. What I just said is something that everyone who’s been through the whole story or hung around the fandom for some time is supposed to know. She still could hardly believe it, though. That is, she had no idea who the flower really was, she could only guess. But that he had no idea Flowey existed altogether.

“Y-you do remember at least one timeline where... Y-where did it all went to the Surface, right...? I m-mean, since i’ve never know it’s possible to make it there at all...”
“Know it's possible to make it there at all..."

“i remember one time when it happened, yeah"

“He showed up soon after you all stopped Fri from fighting, and before the Barrier began. Just after a split second of seeing the skeleton, her an unsure look and a small shrug, she pulled her phone and quickly searched through the saved in her folders. “Wait a sec— here, look at this. Sure you haven’t seen something like him before?” Sans stared at the cartoony drawing of a yellow flea, a white smiling face on it, but no sign of recollection be seen in his nonexistent eyes. Soon he turned back towards the teenager and shook it apologetically.

“... Shit, you really don’t remember anything. He

“dunno, pal. but i swear that doesn’t ring any

Oh boy. Ooh God. Holy macaroni."

“look. seems pretty obvious that we did me some point, even if i can’t remember.” he continued.

“it’s just that it must’ve been from before in my memories. before that... well. everyone some déjà-vu from time to time, but i was the one who was getting the least of them from the.
who was getting the least of them from me.

if the one iteration that remained tells any and after i got to save them... i’m pretty sure completely stops me from having any sorta vu altogether, now. whatever happened and erased before it was saved in my program memories aren’t gonna come back.”

Huh... Well. Looked like his memory wasn’t complete as she had imagined, after all.

“Déjà-vu is an ability of the self. Gerson soon explained, breaking the silence after he took a sip from his cup of tea. “If you keep your mind sharp and your sympathy open, you’ll see more. But if you close your eyes, you see less.”

He gave a cryptic look at the skeleton, smiling.

“I don’t know what you did. But by cutting your way through time just like that, you miss out on everything the long run has to offer normally. You might even be knowing even less than what others and catch up on again during every in the long run.”

There was a deep, humorless chuckle. “That sounds like a good idea at the time, when i did it. i didn’t wanna forget what i learned back then...
Maybe he was remembering how he was parroting this sentence from someone else. Though... I'm not so sure. I still don't wanna off those memories, but...”

“An error of the youth.” Gerson shook head slowly, in a solemn manner. “I know hard to accept, sonny, but some thing are just... better left inaccessible Knowledge like that... may not be throwing yer life away for.”

Despite the hot cocoa warming her heart, a cold shiver down Dawn’s spine when she heard that last sentence. Instantly flashbacks of a specific line of dialogue read a few times while reading fan theories resurfaced.

* Knowledge like that is the only reason I’ve survived so long.

The fact that this line was supposedly readable on the Genocide Route did not help her feel any better.

She gasped in remembrance. “You already know Sans raised an uneasy, still nonexistent eye. “Y’mean the time-travel issue? well, thing is...”
“Not just the time-travel issue.” she interjected. Then she turned towards the other monster and asserted: “You know about the video game.”

Gerson’s smile completely disappeared. He stared up at the game, eyes widening. He closed his eyes. And then... He nodded.

“I’ve been told about it.”, he confirmed.

This brought so many huge and heavy questions. When? Why? Those didn’t feel like the right one.

“H... H-how much do you know?” This appeared to be as good a starting question as any. Testing knowledge’s boundaries was supposed to be a strategy in order to better understand his answers to the questions that would come afterwards.

“Only what can be deduced from seeing player’s antics and various game titles. They’re supposed to stay invisible all but the players to see. Emphasis on ‘supposed to.’” He laughed again, then paused again; probably for no other reason than for an old dramatic effect.

“It always happens a player’s around, or however that’s Eh, I heard that the game’s still being patched somehow, like it’s still work in progress. Can’t blame it glitchin’ at times. Nothing’s perfect.
Okay, *what* now...? “W-what are you talking about? Does that happen often?”

“I can only remember clearly those events happened during this one iteration of the course. But seeing some this time at least some of the previous ones.” A cryptic smile appeared, the same, always still. “Maybe you’ll cause something to appear, one of these days.”

Against all odds, after a second of silence, Sans said:

“What’re you saying. “player antics”? “game to have you even played a video game before?”

“You would be surprised.” the turtle chimed.

“Undyne is a worthy opponent.”

The subtle shifts on the young skeleton’s skull were difficult to decipher, but seemed to indicate the skeletal was about to say “*that’s not what I meant.*

“No offense, but you must be remembering the i’ve been stuck in quite my fair share of time and i’ve never seen anythin’ like what you’re saying much to begin with.

“The same way you’ve never seen anything like...
“... my point still stands. This makes absolute sense. You must be hallucinatin’ your déjà vu something. They hardly count as memories at all.” The human was already opening her mouth to retort, but Sans cut her off.

“... and before you ask, resurrecting someone...”

“... determination is a huge breakthrough, but absolutely plausible. Whatever it is you’re with that ‘player magic’ of yours, the humans don’t work that way.”

The teenager couldn’t help but stare at him in surprise for the next couple of seconds. To be entirely honest, she always imagined that Sans would be a lot more open-minded than that, especially regarding new, unexplored, and world-changing phenomena.

Still, she had to give him at least some credit; his argument couldn’t possibly be any more vague with his explanation.

“It’s true that...” She started, but never finished.

“What I mean is. Can’t you tell us exactly what you’re talking about? What did you see?”

Gerson immediately replied with a quick “Of course.” Yet, after this, although his mouth was half open, no other sound came out. The danger had been all too real to him; he didn’t want to risk it again.
he was about to utter had to never be said, for the sake of keeping things in order; and as such, a mystic, g" eventfully fell over his unfocused eyes, and the turtle was perfectly silent, as he was supposed to. The guest to wonder if the old man could have fallen asleep during his reminiscing, or somehow been turned into a stone.

After almost a half minute of absolute stillness, it became clear that his mind had drawn a blank. Thankfully, he eventually blinked, bringing back to life his formerly glazed look.

“... Don’t remember.” he finally answered, disappointed himself as he figured his audience.

“Sorry, folks. Looks like someone’s too keen on lettin’ me tell ya.”

Wait, you’ve just been given a warning, and you ignored it already? What are you playing at?

Sans’s eye-sockets darkened dangerously, as though he was on his cup of tea warily and gradually tight.“... What is that supposed to mean?”

Don’t you dare answer that one.

Gerson paused for another set of seconds, still staring at that empty look staring at the void. But he did not move. He closed his eyes, smiled weakly, and shrunk. “Nothing... I mean, I just have a question...
“Nothing you should worry about just kiddo. You’re still young. Got more yer life ahead of you. It’d be a waste to waste it like that. The less you about it, the better.”

Ugh. It could have been worse, I suppose. Still, ever learn to shut up, old man? Trust me, you don’t want to break that kind of fourth wall.

“As I said, I wasn’t supposed to say in the first place. Can’t blame ‘im wanting to fix his mistakes, you know.”

Dawn felt yet another shiver run down her back. She had no idea where this conversation was going, but she sure didn’t like it. “Who are you talking Your “source”? Flowey?”

“I must apologize, kiddo. But I thought I remembered specifically telling that I can’t give that away.”

Okay, now this was starting to frustrate her too. Giving vague and incomplete answers to tease her to give up on explaining the whole thing halfway it wasn’t fair!

Still, if she could gather enough clues from what already said so far... Some “weird video game” description... if only she could piece together...
happening, even if they weren’t supposed to be called them “glitches”, more or less, and claimed needed not to be addressed because a certain was trying to patch things up in the meantime...

Well. This profile, too, sounded familiar.

“I see... That’s too bad.” she sighed overdramatically.

“And here I thought I once heard about a character who’d supposedly have to patch holes in a certain fabric... Multiple characters, All supposed to allude to the main developers artists who created the game.”

She paused calmly, even attempting her own version of an old turtle’s cryptic smile when she sent him a sarcastic...

“Fun fact, if you look at the Kickstarter’s wiki, you realize that originally they had created multiple dog personas for each of the main team members. In the end they only kept the one that represented Toby Fox himself, but hey, who knows. Since I am here I’ve been able to see quite a lot of stuff hidden from the regular players. You never know.

Ugh. Congratulations, old man. She wasn’t supposed to hear about that before at least a few more days. She found a way to rush her investigation and shoot her a schedule without thinking of the consequences...
Having finished her speech, Dawn crossed her arms with a puffed up chest confidently, waiting for her plans to take effect. Next to her, Sans was sipping his tea, his unsure glowing pupils lost in the void and unable to handle this newfound information.

Gerson’s reaction was... underwhelming, to say the least. The monster had closed his eyes and appeared to be lost in his thoughts; but he also was quite serene. Perhaps the contrary of what she had been shooting for. Sans had to be the one to eventually break the silence and ask for clarifications.

“um... mind givin’ us a bit more details about this?”

The human shrugged. “Do you remember that dog who always trolls Papyrus in Snowdin?”

“there’s... lots of white dogs in snowdin, pal. “

“There’s one that’s supposed to drive Papyrus on a regular basis. A small Pomeranian, I believe. That’s the one.” she explained. “The "Annoying" dog is supposed to represent the creator of the game. I heard that some sprite files even call it "tokimeki" or something. Anyway, in-universe speaking, the game treats it like it was “accidentally programmed” by the dog barking with text-to-speech on. I was wondering if that has to do with anything. Of course, I don't know for sure...”
thought it was just a joke, but... you never
We didn’t know that the game was real, either.

No sign of recollection came on the monster’s face on the other hand, he looked downright skeptical regarding the human’s explanations, laughing openly at her the whole time.

“programmin’ a whole game with text-to-speech, but better yet, “programming” us? well, y’know, they say about the monkeys and the typewriter. Despite him, a smugly doubtful chuckle resonated.

“still, just the idea of bein’ created by a text on a screen by some dumb animal playin with a microphone.”

He seemed about to repress some more mocking, but he was interrupted when the bookshelf on the wall behind him partially gave way, giving one of the tomes the opportunity to support a push just strong enough to let it fall on the back of the impertinent skeleton’s skull. The pain was immediate and satisfying enough as a lesson.

Instantly imagining the worst upon remembering she only had “1 HP”, Dawn put her cocoa down on the table and rushed to him in panic, almost expecting him to dust in the next couple of seconds.

“i’m fine, i’m fine!” he repeated, brushing her hair out of her face.
"I'm fine, I'm fine!" he repeated, brushing her off, refusing to remove his hand from the back of her chair. Fortunately, it seemed that he was going to start a new story.

"Good thing books don't have intent."

Gerson watched the two visitors’ antics with a slightly amused, mischievous smile. When the party grew tired and silence came back, he sent Sans a small hint.

“There are powerful forces at work, Sonny. The least you wanna do is respect them, if you wanna live long.”

The skeleton grunted annoyingly, still leaving his bony hand glued to the spot where the book had stopped. "I don’t really believe in that superstition, Sonny. Sorry. Not my fault if your shelf’s broken."

The turtle’s only answer to that was a “Oh well, try to warn you” shrug. Dawn’s reaction, however, was that of sudden curiosity.

“You have superstitions about this...?"

“Always. Lots of stuff about not angerin’ the ghosts of the angel or hanging delta runes upside down, and whatnot.” Sans sighed, emphasizing his diatribe with his quoting gestures and childish tone of voice, citing his examples. “That one is new, though..."
“The most important ones are not necessarily the most widely spread, so Gerson stated calmly, always with the same

“Stories are mostly told to inspire behavior and hope through the hard of the day. Those that do nothing suck out all meaning in our lives... better off keeping them in the dark.

“whatever you say.” Instead of trying to reason, Sans gave up, as he merely bent forward to the book that fell and hand it back to its owner. “be careful where you put your shelves, next waterfall and centuries old wood are accidents waiting to happen.”

As soon as the former vendor let his eyes widen on the book’s cover, his entire face lit up like that on their birthday.

“Oho...! Look what fate decided to at yer thick skull.” he cheered joyfully.

“Good ol’ Ammott. Looks like you his old diary.”

The human frowned in confusion. “Ammott...”

“Ammott Dinsprie. He used to be Royal Children’s tutor, back in the
You should definitely find some time to read it, as soon as the circumstances allow it. It’ll teach you a lot about the life in this world.”

... Huh. The more you know. To be honest, like I said before, and especially because she had been surrounded by many friends deep into the theories domain, I always imagined that Chara and Asriel grew up at the same time when W. D. Gaster was the Royal Scientist, so I somewhat expected *that* name to show up instead. “Royal Children’s tutor” and “Royal Scientist” don’t sound like different things, at least to some extent.

After hearing Gerson’s excitement at sharing his knowledge, she had expected him to hand the book over for her to read; but instead, he kept it close to himself and, standing up from his seat, went to put it away on a different shelf, before he came back to sit down on his armchair. “But for now... You have enough on your plate already. There’s no point in following that book. It won’t follow you. You’re going.” he quickly justified.

The turtle monster slowly bent backwards, making him even more comfortable inside his armchair and took a deep breath, as his smile expanded into pure satisfaction.

“Well... My job here is done,” he declared.
“There is nothing left for you for... Now, your only future... is backward.”

“Yeah, I need to Reset, I know.” the human said

“But how do I do that? I’ve been trying for many an hour or something.”

“Trust your fate. Don’t force it.”

“Fate”, huh...

Even before she realized the reason why, this sentence once again sent chills down her spine.

* Fate finds a way.
* In life’s grand scheme, might be why you came in the first place...

... Damned was this game for being so darn cryptic everything for no other reason than for being cryptic

“It will happen when the right comes.” Gerson added, as if no time at all had spent between his first sentence and this

“... Which must be pretty soon, give Fluffybuns’s comin’ this way.”

This last precision was dropped like an anvil, effective, and extremely painful.
effective, and extremely painful.

“he’s—” Sans jumped out of his seat, crashing the teacup down on the table with a thundering sound. “Why didn’t you tell us!?”

Gerson’s tales had been so entrancing that he almost effectively forgotten all about Asgore. Was this part of the plan all along? Was this what backstabbing felt like? ... Far from sharing his visitors’ distress, Gerson had not moved an inch.

“It was meant to happen sooner or later. This chat was nice while it lasted, The show must go on.” the turtle stated solemnly.

“An’ that’s why I trust the providence that you’ll do just fine.”

“providence my butt.” the skeleton sputtered at the irony.

“dawn, we need to go right now.”

The teenage girl was right behind him and didn’t waste any time. That implied order to decide what had to be done. The skeleton immediately extended her hand towards him, and he promptly took it in his, ready to warp their way out of this place. Just before they left, the crafty reptile had one last thing to give, cryptic and unhelpful as ever:

“You’re lucky that time’s on your side. It has your back for now... but don’t count on it.
like you own it. Trust me, you don’t need to go.

To be fair, Sans hardly listened to it, and was already halfway away by the time Gerson was done. Not that it was a bad turtle at all, for that matter. Diving even further into his armchair, however possible it was, he closed his eyes, took a sip from a cup of tea, and gave out one last, disillusioned sigh.

“Hah... Poor girl. She won’t last a week.”

“Wow. You sure changed the record fast, didn’t you?”

Without opening his eyes, one eyebrow went up.

“Oh, you’re still here? I thought you wanna follow after them. Aren’t they the main focus?”

Somewhere between two small rocks, the earth a bit and a yellow flower emerged.

“I was going to, but then I thought we needed to follow after all those fairytales you told them.” he grumbled.

“You old fool. That wasn’t part of the plan.”

“I didn’t tell them what’s right. I told them what they needed to hear.” the turtle muttered. “I thought that’s what they wanted me to do. Keep them alive longer.”

There was a funny, but empty smile.
There was a funny, but empty short.

“Funny of you to think that I’m doing this because I want to.” Flowey countered. “I know what it takes to survive. Not crossing the game’s will is “How Left Alone and Alive” one-o’-one.”

Gerson hardly blinked, stolid.

“How did you even pull that off? I can’t believe I remembered that much just by looking at her.”

“Don’t remember nothin’, boy. You’re the only one telling me all that yer thinkin’. Ain’t my fault if you’re no good at keeping secrets... Young Prince.”

He scoffed. “This is the first time this happened. You shouldn’t be getting any déjà-vu!”

“Is it? I can’t tell.” Gerson smiled deviously.

“Looks like my insight’s just that.”

The young flower’s face crunched up in annoyance, also in a different kind of feeling that he forced to hide, but that almost appeared to be apprehensiveness.

“You talk too much.” he warned in a threat but winded voice.

“I’m old. Way past the age when I can’t hardly move. Too weak.” the old lady complained.
whatever I want.” the elder bragged playfully. “I’ve lived and seen for far longer than I should’ve. Death can come any’ time. See if I’ll care.”

“Falling down should be the least of your worries if you had any care for this world.”

A bark of laughter erupted. “Look who’s talking. Now I’m gettin’ empathy lessons from you? That’s rich.”

“I don’t care what happens to you, but you should care for yourself. Your fate’s tied to that brat, just like everybody else.”

“I have nothing to do with that brat personally. I know you don’t either. He took another sip. “Only thing I got interest in is that lil’ game of yours. How yer still thinking it’ll lead somewhere at the end. Let me tell you son. It won’t.”

By this point, all traces of apprehension had disappated. Only annoyance remained.

“Shut up, before I make you.”

“Wah-hah. Don’t you have anything better to do than give the old guy a lecture? I bet your little protégé’s in a t
situation right now. Shouldn’t you be sure she makes it out alive? It’d be a shame for her time to end so soon.

Gerson’s cryptic smile showed up one last time, and he scanned the little flower without fear.

“We both know who’s more deadly in the long run, between you and Fluffybottom.”

“Oh, you think I’M a threat?” the child challenged.

“Didn’t you hear what that brat said? Someone here got to keep things in check. I wouldn’t cross them if I were you.”

“Yes, yes, right you are.” Gerson shrugged.

“How go before Asgore kills her for ya knucklehead. We all know they won’t make it without the right push.”

“On my way.” Flowey rolled his eyes in exasperation.

“How’s that tea coming along, by the way?”

The tea cup was barely a fraction of an inch away from the turtle’s mouth, when he stopped in the middle of drinking. He took an instant to appreciate the still warm steam rising peacefully from the hot beverage and then he kept raising peacefully from the hot beverage and then he beak and beard. A nice, yet barely absent flower was lifted in the air, while small vibrant specks disappeared and dissolved among the originally
Buttercups.

Why, it had been so long since he had seen this poisonous color. Gerson raised a silent, unsurprised, still somewhat disappointed look, back at his inquisitor. Maybe the fact that he did not lose face and that it did not appear in his expression, not even for a single moment, was the last straw.

“I hope you’ll have enough time to choke on it before the Reset comes.” the soulless flower spoke.

“Show’s over for you, at least. You idiot.”

How it happened doesn’t matter.

How Asgore found them within seconds after landing his shortcut, doesn’t matter. How Sans ended up trapped in one of Asgore’s paws and Dawn in the other, doesn’t matter. How Sans found himself unable of teleporting anymore, paralyzed by bone-crushing, dusty pain, doesn’t matter.

These last sentences voice an opinion that may not be shared among a majority. Still, it is an opinion. Just as it is an opinion to cry out that seizing and pulling a soul out of a human’s body without...
killing them first requires so much power that it normally be judged impossible to accomplish.

Nevertheless, it still is exactly what happened, because good old Fluffybuns was starting to think too much time had been wasted through stalling inevitable; the same way writing thousands of words on black paper is if, in the end, despite all the development and revelations they tell, it all amounts to nothing because of an unsatisfying ending that leaves you with no lesson to learn, no answers to the questions you have been cruelly raised, and no happy ending for the characters you may or may not have been rooting for.


Dawn was firmly held by a giant pawed hand twenty feet up in the air; all by courtesy of having in one of the bedrooms in the upper floors of MT only to then have a six-souls powered Asgore’s walls separating the outside of the building from whether horizontal or vertical.

Just by seeing the King’s face... It pained her to think she wondered whether he really was just angry to fully disregard the consequences his actions could
to fully disregard the consequences his actions could have or if, as Gerson mentioned... He had merely snapped, one way or another. Could the six souls have an effect on his mind or sanity? Asgore’s expression was similar to blind rage, not...

A new kind of pain shot through her chest and disrupted her train of thoughts entirely. Whatever was happening, it was like something had taken a hold on her soul, but in a more tangible way than what Sans’s blue magic had been. Some foreign but physical influence was actually trying to pull her soul from within, and trying to pull it out. Worse: it definitely felt like it was working. She couldn’t do anything against it. It was the end.

The two fugitives exchanged one last horrified glance. Sans could not escape, he could not help her. He felt himself slowly losing his grip on reality as the smell of dust was slowly engulfing him, and sans, human with absolutely no combat experience, was being pulled by a Boss Monster with almost as much power as an Emperor. She was dead. Absolutely dead. As dead as he was destined to be.

The King’s pull was admittedly slow, but slowly, As a cyan light was starting to appear at a location outside of her chest, the human’s vain struggle to a stop, as she appeared to have lost conscious...
She was going to die. She was going to die. She was going to die.

Well, I told you it was boring. Like that’d really help. Plot Armor is such a cheating life saver when your characters stuck in these impossible situations.

Sans woke up in a start. Foreign memories flash across his skull, in complete contradiction with what his body was telling him about his surroundings. As some sort of time-traveling knowledge was done settling in, he knew exactly what this meant.

This wasn’t the first time this strange sensation had happened, and as such, as soon as his eye-sockets opened, he knew exactly what to do, as if by (nonexistent) muscle memory. First thing, by reflex, he jumped out of bed without a second thought. Then, his attention and field of vision were directed towards the tiny little details he had to look out for first: mirror, window, calendar... Not that any of his past selves ever bothered to keep the calendar up to date, ugh. Still needed to remember to look at that one because it was a stupid waste.

Anyway. He needed to focus. How far back did she go?

**Location:** His bed, his room. Snowdin Town.

**Time:** Judging by his pajamas and the state of the ceiling lights outside, early morning.
Sans opened the door of his room in a rush, then ran to the bannister and looked down.

Papyrus raised his head in surprise, but soon a grin full of enthusiasm sliced his skull in half:

“Oh! Good morning, Sans! You woke up early today. There’s oatmeal breakfast!”

Sans ran back to his room, slammed the door behind him, and faceplanted in his bed.


Well. On the bright side: Papyrus was back, everybody was back, nobody would remember the past month, probably wouldn’t have to deal with an angry-powered Fluffybuns anytime soon. Also Papyrus.

Now, the drawbacks: he would have to start everything from scratch. *Again.*

... Oh, wait. He needed to go fetch the human, too.

There were a few sharp knocks on the door.

“*Sans, are you alright? Do you need to talk? What happened?!*”
When Papyrus entered, Sans was already gone.

As soon as Sans arrived, he found the hotel room cleaner state than when he had left it. It was empty, he felt very lucky that nobody had been booking point in time; nobody was there, except for...

Dawn was lying on the floor, alive but visibly. If things had happened the way he was guessing she certainly had been dropped from a height of a dozen feet, and had understandably failed the due to the suddenness of Asgore’s disappearance her unconsciousness. Bad luck had her land bare to the left of the gigantic bed right next to her.

But. She was alive. He rushed to her, but she didn’t acknowledge him. A quick look at her soul showed it was a bit out of place and in obvious intense, but from what he could see with his limited knowledge and perception, he detected no serious injuries to the body. He maintained his magical grasp on her soul and keep it as soft as possible, and thankfully, after minute or two, the human let out a tiny whimper a matter of seconds before she was conscious enough to turn her head towards him and whisper his name.

“are you alright?”
“Y... Y-yeah. Kinda feels like I might’ve sprained an ankle or something, though...” She quickly added in a lower, somewhat joking tone: “And my back probably other things, too. Everything hurts.”

She tried to roll on her side so she could sit up, but the skeleton quickly jumped on his feet and offered hand as support. She didn’t think twice and seized it, trying to put the rest of her weight on her uninjured hand then slowly putting the other down and letting it hand... She visibly failed to restrain a wince of pain. The air that seethed through her teeth made Sans feel pain for her too. That sounded nastier than she did.

“... Yeoooooowch. O-okay, that hurts. A lot. But not “atrocious hellish pain that’ll make you see like a dead pig”, so, I g-guess it’s fine...? How pain is too much pain anyway? Kinda subjective.

Besides, as Dawn reasoned, if Sans had been numerous timelines before, he would know about the poor guy.

Sans could very easily see through her euphemism—he did not insist. Sadly for her, they had more important matters at hand; he was at least thankful that this wasn’t going to be a whining burden.

“Anyway, what happened? And why are you wi...
Anyway, what happened? And why are you wearing those pajamas while dressed like a skeleton? She did not feel the need to end her sentence with the mere sight of the barefooted, pajama-wearing skeleton was too much to process. The fact that the sentence “I’ll feel better yesterday” was written in a goofy font on his black tee-shirt was the main thing behind her mind shutting down, admittedly.

Sans’s already strained and worried smile suddenly crumbled. His eye-sockets widened as he stared at her.

“...you seriously didn’t figure it out yet?”

“I think I passed out at some point...? I missed most of the action.” she apologized with a sheepish smile.

Oh boy.

Could it be that she... hadn’t actually done it on purpose?

“Well... it’s really hard for me to believe you didn’t notice when you did it, but you, uh, “reset.” to before frisk fell down, even.”

“What...?!?” Yep, she totally hadn’t meant to.

“Hey, ‘twas about time. I was startin’ to wonder how many death threats you needed before you’d consider third time’s the charm, I guess? anyway I can’t really get upset that you sent us that far in the past, but we were kinda out of options back then...”
“No, Sans...” Then Alphys, Grillby— their memories.

“besides, gotta get real. if you’d let yourself we would’ve lost our shield against the i mean, since you’re not from this world, the jumps shouldn’t affect you at all, so if you even going back in time wouldn’t save you, so She tensed and bit her lips resolutely. “Sans.”

“it’s going to slow us down, but it’s much better than getting stuck in time loops again and not able to progress at all. and everyone’s back they won’t all want to kill you that hard anyway so in the grand scheme of things, this must’ve the best outcome for everyone, i guess.”

“Sans!”

“what?”

Right after this outburst, and after the surprise, successfully interrupted him, the teenager found gulping tensely. But after a split second, she recovered stared, her eyes filled with determined, yet terrifi. This was the look of blunt honesty. Even if it had

She inhaled sharply. “I didn’t do it.”
“T-the key is to k-keep it elevated in ice.” Alphys assured, pacing back and forth between the loading screen on her computer and the boiler on her desk at the other end of the room.

“At least that’s what they say in a...” Sans complied without question, securing a soaked cloth around Dawn’s entire foot and almost up her knee, and basking it all in a bowl filled with ice. The human had first attempted to convince them, but it seemed she could take care of it herself, that “it’s just a sprain, guys, I’m not gonna die or anything”, but this was another battle of will that she surprisingly lost. Or partially lost, since at least she was thankful enough to provide the obviously unaware monsters with whatever medical knowledge she had.

Which wasn’t much, but just enough to not make things too much worse, and to prevent her monster friends from unintentionally finishing her off. Not that she ever let her situation to be lethal in any urgent case, but with the two, she never knew. They had the best of intentions, despite their undisputable intellectual brilliance, and it was sadly obvious that their subject of research had nothing to do with keeping humans alive.

It was kind of nice to have Sans so intent on seeing her as fast as possible, but all at the same time, I...
exactly hiding the fact that said intent had not much to do with her personally and much more to do with the fact as he had repeated a dozen times to Alphys, “if it’s the end for us too.” Whatever that meant to Speaking of Alphys... It was painful. She was keeping distance with them, she was stuttering a lot more than usual, she was both keeping and avoiding eye. Alphys’s nervous looks were difficult to return. They were similar to how she used to behave during the "night", when they had first met; she was much less and much more frightened and confused, even sparks of recognition still shone here and there, Well, it was great to see her alive and okay. But still...

“The s-soul scan looks... I m-mean, there’s no major injury left, s-so... That’s Sans walked to the lizard’s side and stared at them and although he did not seem to understand much he was seeing, he was contented with what he had...”

“Nice. If that’s all, guess it means we just have to stay put until we’re done with the repairs.”

“You’re... going to fix your time machine and the teenager asked, raising a suspicious eyebrow uneasily raising her voice due to the distance.”
“well, duh.” he shrugged. “i mean... i know i have to rebuild the other one too since you brought it back to a time before i had it, but, uh... after what happened, i’m gonna want to be working on the time machine first.”

“Can’t exactly blame you on that.” she smiled "It’s okay. I understand.”

She had meant these words to be genuine... but felt hollow in the end. God would she miss her faith. She gulped, trying to find the strength to once more face the question that ate her from the inside every time she woke up. She had already been given an answer, she wasn’t convinced the slightest.

“Are you sure there couldn’t be even a tiny chance that maybe I didn’t do it?”

Ugh. She really didn’t want to drop that one, didn’t she? Sans rolled his eye-lights. “kid, i already told you, i did the math over and over. there was no way i could go as far as invite any of you guys here if i didn’t know exactly what i was doing.” he sighed. “i scan thousands of souls from afar, and the spectrometer’s results were clear. the men their dt level was much higher than the game.”
... tell you what. we’re already in the perfect...

either because she had effectively installed doubt in me, or because she made him want to prove her wrong...
whatnot, so if you want proof that you did it, I'll give it to you. How's that sound?"

"... There's a way to check that?" Needless to say, that sounded perfect.

"Y-your soul is already f-four stronger than it s-should be... There's no question that this amount of determination should g-give you a-anything... Y-you know." Alphys rambled uneasily.

"Only thing that's *almost* as powerful as that is the game's anchor limit. You just have to score higher than that. And as I already said, that should be no problem for you."

The Determination Extractor Machine is such an amazing piece of monster technology. So ahead of its time, pioneering engine and source of even more advanced study in the study of magic...

The human's knowledge of this machine is, as a knowledge, she has of this world, broader than it should, and all at the same time, insultingly limited. She should suspect the intricacies of its wiring, nor does she stand the full scope of the power inside her SODA. She enters the skull-shaped scanner, she adm...
She enters the skull-shaped scanner, she admires it, lets herself feel intimidated by its beauty and its entrancing but phobia-inducing shape, but she needs to see what is at stake and what this machine represents to the universe it is anchored in.

And now... this is where it ends. In just a few minutes, the result of her SOUL’s determination level will be revealed, just a simple number, for everyone to see. Five digits that define the fate of an entire world.

She has not a single clue that, starting from this instant... her future is sealed.

The determination level that the video game influence has been proven to amount to is 42.0 as Sans had measured it times and times again, across past timelines with minute precision, to the point where he knew this number by heart and could recite it in a moment without hesitation.

Any human soul originating from the world this Player came from is supposed to be high enough to pass that limit so that the most random person taking the test there would still be above that score by at least three units; just as what Sans explained.

If the density of the population of all humans in this world were to follow a Gaussian curve, (we have not a clue what this is, but that’s what Sans said),
definitely does not), the probability for a human to be below the game’s level would be of less than which amounts to one chance in twenty thousand.

All this being said... This is truly a shame. This is such an anticlimactic end, especially after could have been a different, much more violent. Both options are so unsatisfying in their own way.

It is somewhat tragic to use a last-ditch effort your protagonists out of a premature ending, find them at the dawn of another hardly an hour. After all, once they gain their answer for sure, there to come? There is no more drama; no surprises; not nearly as much as there has been at least. She is injured, and as such, much less do anything interesting for a while because not this universe has any reason to push her to. Why come to disrupt Sans’s research again?

Asgore? It would be a miracle if, even if he were again that a human was present, he would be come before at least a few days.

Undyne? The human was going to be stuck skeletons’ house for a while, which meant that was definitely going to be there to prevent any dangerous from happening. Who could possibly
any sort of drama?

Mettaton? Maybe if he learned that a human was present in the Underground then he would devote part of his show to that topic, but it was unlikely that he would still find a way to make that about himself instead; and even then...

That human had her good moments, but... she was bland. She had not much drama potential since the start, and now that she was injured, what little stuff she could have pulled in the past day are now out the window until she heals. She has no more potential to bring for this story. She has brought the end.

41.972 KMS

... doesn’t have enough? Huh.
Well. Now that changes everything.
Nobody needed to tell Dawn that they had arrived in Hotland. Even if they had not specifically mentioned it out loud before going down the specially built stairs descending to the bottom floor of the entire Underground and even if she had been unobservant enough to miss the few direction boards laying around, the heat alone was indication enough that they had arrived, as it greeted them as soon as they reached the bottom of the stairs.

Dawn yet again wondered where those stairs came from and why the entrance to the Hotland region looked so different from the game, but she reasoned that given how big the Underground was and how many new places she had got to see, she wouldn’t have put it past them to have more than just one access from Waterfall to Hotland. Maybe the path the players were supposed to take was located somewhere else and she just didn’t see it.

The monsters had long thought during their ride through Waterfall about what their next place to hide should be. The laboratory, although being an arguably good choice, was sadly too obvious, since Asgore certainly knew by now that Alphys was part of the team. Grillby offered shelter in the flat his wife and son lived in, but that option involved telling the truth to his family as well, and there was again the risk that Asgore already knew he was helping them.

After much debate, Mettaton’s Resort ended up as the winning location by default, due to it being debatably the least obvious choice, as well as a decent enough hiding place on the long term. It had been long abandoned following the robot’s misfortunate death, so the likelihood of meeting coincidental bystanders was nearly nonexistent; and if they arrived through a shortcut and left the entrance locked, this should leave no obvious trace of their presence and give them more time.

Sadly, the group was not granted the opportunity to follow through with this plan.

Loud and slow stomping sounds resonated, somewhere far ahead. Everybody immediately stopped. To the human’s absolute dismay, the Gaster Blaster materialized again and started hovering above their heads. It soon descended and almost reached ground level in front of them, and its summoner silently ordered them to climb, specifically sending her a wordless “this is not negotiable” look.

She was slower than they would have all preferred, but to her credit, she was still able to stand and approach the giant skull despite her shaky legs, and the assistance she gained from Alphys and
Sans gently but hurriedly pushing her towards her intended spot accelerated the process to an acceptable level.

As soon as all four had taken their seats, the giant bullet flew away from the ground and as far away from the path as possible, hiding in the shadows of the main cave’s walls. From there, they could finally see the source of such noise.

They would have very well preferred not knowing.

Far away in the distance, but still tall enough to be easily noticeable, stood a gigantic creature. It was blocking the main path and slowly making its way towards Waterfall.

One glance was enough. They all recognized him.

They all understood what had happened.

Asgore was staring straight in their direction.

The blaster dashed towards the upper floors.

The king gave chase. His running was as fast as it was loud.

“How did he even make it before us!?” Truth be told, there was no use for discretion anymore. Finally Dawn could panic as much as she wanted.

“M-maybe he took the access to the capital through the marsh? I don’t know!” Alphys answered, just as panicked. “It’s NOT a shortcut! Unless he could somehow FLY through the whole thing, there’s no way he could’ve been faster than us!”

Cue the six sevenths of a god deploying a pair of feathered wings and taking flight with all the grace and speed of his six-soul powered glory.

“I just HAD to say it…!” the lizard deplored, face-palming with deadpan savviness.

“...Well that explains the flying issue.” Grillby muttered, with much less concern in his voice than he felt like he should have put. “Um... It was nice meeting all of you, I suppose.”

“We’re NOT gonna die.” Sans countered, gritting his teeth and repeating various words with the
intensity of every mantra he knew. “can’t die. can’t fail. worked too hard for this. not now. not this time.”

The three passengers exchanged sorry looks, all thinking the same thing but not daring to say it out loud. If they had even one chance in a million to get out of this situation alive, then letting the only one who still felt even a single faltering ray of hope know that his opinion was not shared by the others was the best way to blow it for real.

Dawn maintained her silence, but the sadness in her eyes when she sent Alphys a desperate and questioning look soon let the scientist guess exactly what she had in mind.

“Don’t worry about time jumping out of this. By now, I’m positive that’s our only real chance.” she whispered back.

“But he has six souls.” she trembled. “I’m only supposed to be as strong as four of them, r-right? What if it means that he…?”

“He can’t.” she assured. “Monsters have been proven to be completely unable of time jumping, no matter how powerful. If he had seven souls that’d make him a god, so maybe then something different would happen… But he only has six.”

“you’re still in charge.” Sans concluded sharply and resolutely, as he started to get annoyed at the length of Alphys’s explanation. “put that to good use.”

… Yes. As much as it pained her to erase shared memories and friendships… It was now obvious that they had no other choice left. She had to Reset.

So she closed her eyes, tried to focus, or meditate, or stay calm and determined, and…

A giant hand engulfed more than half of their view. Sans’s magic maneuvered the blaster in order to avoid it; but just as it appeared that they had gotten away from its grasp, ghastly white flames continued the assault, leaving the four passengers with no other choice than to be hit by the bullets closing on them from almost all angles, or fight back.

They really only had one option. It was merely debatable as to which one it was going to amount to at the end of the battle, depending on whether or not it was going to make a difference at all.

Alphys and Grillby stood up, one facing the rear and the other focusing on one side, but they soon found difficulty in keeping their balance due to the erratic trajectory of their means of locomotion. Thankfully it did not alter too much their ability at generating and throwing their own bullets,
mostly with the goal of stopping Asgore’s from reaching their target. Sans first tried to take part in
the battle as well, but he soon found himself unable of battling and keeping steady control over his
blaster’s direction at the same time, and had no other choice than to focus on his driving.

As for Dawn… To be fair, contrary to what one could have feared due to how she had handled the
trip in Waterfall, she was not stuck on the blaster as a trembling fleshy ball. Probably because she
was seeing the monsters fight, she felt inspired to assist them; maybe a burst of adrenaline even
made her forget her vulnerability, or made her think that if monsters were fighting back, then she, a
human, was naturally expected to be more resilient than them.

Still, it did not mean that she was all that useful. She was desperately looking around them for
something to do or use as a weapon or shield, only to find none. Furthermore, not being a crippling
mess of tears did not mean that she was fearless; in spite of her efforts, the environmental chaos and
bone were no help to her abilities at critical thinking, and only increasing her panic and
hopelessness. Even when the skeleton summoned a long and solid bone and provided her with a
potential weapon of defense, she found herself with no other choice than to use it as a makeshift
baseball bat and hope that what middle school PE classes had taught her would be enough to help
save their lives. It was already a miracle that fire bullets actually acted like solid shapes that could
be bounced off.

This was when Sans realized a terrible reality:

The human had not a single clue how to fight.

Never think you already saw the worst of your opponent, instead be ready for any surprises.
Bullets can come from anywhere, but never turn your back on your opponent. Don’t waste a single
second, because every action matters. Stamina is the key, not firepower. The list went on.

Needless to say, the club-like bone bullet did not last long. The first bullet to hit it at an unexpected
angle completely tore it apart in the middle, and soon the entire structure fell apart and Dawn was
found holding nothing but thin air.

Then went the next horde of bullets, hitting from below.

The blaster shook, more and more white smithereens appeared and gathered around Sans as he was
using more and more magic to hold everything in place…

Then another bullet hit, yet again from below.

The blaster burst into white nothingness. Then there was nothing but orange walls rising from the
ground at high speed, the sound of wind howling, and the silhouette of a deadly creature shrinking
in the hellish fiery sky.
For an instant, Dawn found herself thinking that it was over.

Even if Sans generated another blaster. Even if they survived the landing, which they reasonably could not due to how fast they were already falling by this point. Even if they could continue fighting off Asgore’s bullets, which they had hardly been able to do so far due to how obviously powerful a six-soul powered Boss Monster was compared to regular ones, and compared to herself.

Asgore would keep following them. They could not escape. They could not hide forever. He would just find them again.

Her friends were falling to their death, and she was too; wasn’t this the perfect timing if she wanted to Reset things back to a more peaceful time? She was determined to give everyone their Happy Ending and save the world and she did not want to die, right? So why wasn’t this working…?!

Was she so stupid that she could not figure how to use a simple game feature? Was she so useless that because of her, everybody would die, either forever or until something weird happened and the game Reset the world again, only to trap all the monsters in its infinite time loop once again and ruin Sans’s plans entirely?

She wanted to go back. She wished it with all her might. How could this not be enough…?

She saw the gigantic paw of the almost-godlike Asgore (Omega Asgore? Photoshop Asgore?) approach her from below, ready to catch her. It was the end.

If not the sudden bright blue glow coming from her chest, it definitely was the jerk and sudden change in her fall’s trajectory that pulled her back into reality and made her realize that Sans still had not given up. She looked around and saw him falling beside her, with Alphys and Grillby further away; Sans’s hand and sockets were filled with blazing blue magic, and when she saw that he was pulling her towards him, she tried to reach out and extended her hand as far as she physically could. Finally their hands touched, and they did not let go.

Sans looked at Alphys and Grillby, still falling and trying to use their magic in various ways, but to no avail.

Sans looked down. The lava was close. Too close.

There was no time. There was no choice.

He sent each one of his three companions one last, hopeless and apologetic look. He certainly wanted to say that he was sorry; but even if he did say it, nobody could have heard him.

His sockets closed and the entire world disappeared.

For her first shortcut, this certainly was disorienting; and definitely not what she would have
Instead of landing in molten blazing hell at an absolutely deadly speed, all of Dawn’s adrenaline was washed off when the howls of the wind stopped and she was engulfed in cold, dark water. Her body’s survival instinct was the only thing that allowed her to pull herself back to the surface and cough out all the liquid she had inadvertently ingested following the shock of finding herself in an entirely new location without warning.

Only when she could stand on her shaky freezing legs and look around could she find Sans in pretty much the same position as her and fully process what had happened, while having just as many questions to ask.

“Y-you sent us back in Waterfall?” ‘Why here of all places?’ and ‘We were there just a few minutes ago, what was the point of going back here?’ were going to be her next questions, but the skeleton’s coughing was too loud, and even after it stopped, he did not let her phrase these ones.

“i don’t know what happened— we were supposed to land in the hotel, but something came up.” he retorted hurriedly. “i couldn’t get past him. t’was like the barrier. but that…”

“So he interfered with your shortcut or something…?”

“I don’t k n o w, okay!?”

Sans pulled himself up with apparent difficulty. The human walked to him warily and offered a hand to help him, but he did not take it. She did not insist.

Dawn looked around. No one in view. Her stomach sank.

“W-what about…?” The names she had in mind did not make it on her tongue. It was too painful to say.

“don’t.” the monster snapped in a low, hoarse voice. A weird sound followed. It almost sounded like a sob. “p-please… just don’t.”

He was panting. Maybe more than just that. Instead of trying to stand up, eventually he just gave up, sitting in the water and letting the cold liquid splashing loudly around him and submerging him up to his shoulders when his legs gave way. The human sent him alarmed and sad looks, willing to encourage him to at least go back to more solid and dry ground, but unable to voice them and push him too hard. He pretended not to notice. Of course now the kid would want to lead the action. Of freaking course. Had she already forgotten how she had acted in the face of danger? Did she expected.
seriously think they still had a chance?

There was a low, disheartened sigh. “why didn’t you try to go back yet?” he asked angrily, but also with a chilling, nihilistic calm. Of course, deep within, every human was the same. “afraid you’d miss out on something if you did? didn’t you get enough?”

Dawn’s jaw dropped in absolute incredulity, and the shock of hearing this was so sudden and strong that she needed almost a full dozen of seconds before she could find her voice back. But when she did, she did not hesitate a single moment to say everything she had on her mind.

“Wh— Are you serious? Of course I tried to Reset! It’s not my fault if it just— doesn’t work! How could you ever believe that I wanted to stay in that crazy fighting thing!? We could’ve all died out there! M-maybe Alphys and Grillby already did!”

She could hardly believe it. How was this any of her fault? How could he accuse her of deliberately slowing things down and putting them in danger? How could he seriously think that this player mentality of wanting to do things just for the sake of seeing how far the rabbit hole could go and escaping the consequences would play here, when she both cared for every single person involved, and when the consequences were absolutely real for everybody around them, herself included? Was he for real?

“In fact, since you ask me why I didn’t Reset earlier,” she stuttered breathlessly, “I can do the same — why didn’t you teleport us all, with the blaster, before Asgore exploded it in our faces? Huh?!”

“i can’t take that many people at once!” he instantly snapped back. “in fact, i’ve never taken more than one person with me at any time, an’ all these shortcuts all day have been wearin’ me down a lot more than i’d like to admit. happy now?”

The teenager crossed her arms and furrowed her eyebrows in annoyance. “You could’ve just said it, you know.” If he went out and called her childish or anything, that would take the cake.

As soon as the skeleton raised his skull and almost-empty eye-sockets towards her, a seven-second-long staring contest began. For the first time ever, the human was the one who eventually gave in.

“I’m not gonna blame you if your shortcuts ‘don’t work that way’ or something like that.” she sighed and turned around. But immediately she turned again and pointed a dramatic accusatory
finger: “As long as you don’t blame me for not figuring out how to do something that I literally haven’t been told anything about and that I wasn’t supposed to be able to do until yesterday night. Talk about Guide Dang It! Well, flash news, I don’t know how easy it was for you to learn how to break the laws of physics, but it’s not for me. And don’t you dare tell me I ‘just didn’t try enough’ or whatever.” After a small pause she lit up, although cynically: “Hey, here’s an idea! If you want me to actually find out how to get us out of this mess, just tell me how it works! I mean, isn’t that what you supposedly studied in a lab at some point?”

“a goddam kid figured it out better than you. how hard do you think it is?”

“Oh I don’t know, since it’s so easy, you wanna find some creative ways to kill me repeatedly and see if I figure it out from the afterlife? Maybe blasting my face off will help you get this all out of your system!?”

The girl’s last shouts echoed for a moment around them due to the cave, but were soon engulfed in the surrounding growls of rushing water. Only after hearing her own words did she stop, first because she needed to catch her breath, and then because she realized that maybe Sans was not the only one who needed to get things “out of his system”, after all. Hopefully she had got enough stress out already.

The silence persisted. After a few more seconds, Dawn slowly went to the edge of dry land and sat down, facing the skeleton. She realized that the place looked a lot like the room where the River Person would be expected to appear; but once more, there was nobody in sight.

A few evasive looks were accidentally exchanged once or twice, although each would send their eyes (or floating pupils) in the opposite direction every time they felt like the other had noticed. It was stupid.

Finally Sans spoke up. “…i’m sorry i snapped. again.” He took a second to take another deep breath, then sighed again. “too many things went wrong today. shouldn’t have blamed you for it, though.”

“Definitely not.”

She had initially intended to keep it at that, but eventually found it to be too harsh for him. He had been through hell for way longer than she had, after all. She snorted weakly.

“… And here I thought you said you weren’t mad at the players. Am I reading into it a bit too much or you’re more mad at us than you’d want to tell me?” Unless he was mad at humanity in general, which was yet another option.
There was a forced, strained and humorless laugh. “you didn’t even play. can hardly call you a ‘player’ at all. maybe it’s just frustrating that i couldn’t get a real one to mess with. which makes things even dumber ‘cause everything here is even less your fault than for the others. i’m not even allowed to get mad at you for anything game-related. it’s not like you chose to be the one picked out.”

She cracked up a small twisted smile, beside herself. “Well, if it makes you feel better… I guess I kind of understand how that must feel like…? I mean. You go out of your way to get a player and let them know how much harm they’ve caused to everyone and especially you, and in the end, of all the guys you could’ve got, you get stuck with me.” She let her hands lazily display her own self for emphasis. The silly gesture made her crack up again. “I guess it is kinda unfair that you couldn’t get even a tiny bit of healthy revenge done or something.” Not that it ever stopped him from trolling her all the same, to be fair. She snorted again. “‘Healthy revenge.’ Can’t believe I’d ever say something like that. Is that even a thing?”

“sure you made that one up.”

“Totally did. Revenge is bad.”

There was another pause, filled first with shy and awkward laughter, then with welcomed deep breaths on both sides. Maybe they really just needed to calm down and breathe, and it seemed that where they were, maybe they would at least have some time alone to do just that.

After almost a full minute of silence and introspection during which he examined their options, Sans eventually turned around and asked in a tiny voice:

“… um. are you sure you tried hard enough…?”

Here came the face-palm. “UGH! Yes, I did. I also totally jinxed that you’d ask that one, and even after I said you would you had to ask it anyway.”

The monster shrank his spine in his jacket and seemed about to mutter a fast apology, but he completely forgot to say anything when, outside of the room but much closer than they would have liked, slow footsteps were heard. The two fugitives froze in horror, then Sans jumped on his feet and they dashed around for a possible place to hide, or another way to escape, but none were available.

Sans started yet again to worry… but after letting his anger and panic flow through his trembling bones, he slowly let them leave him. What was even the point…?
“… we’re dead.” he concluded. “we’re all, so totally dead. deader than dead.”

When the apparently lonely stranger made their way inside the room they were in, the exclamation that was uttered was clearly not the one they had expected to hear.

“THERE you two are! I’ve been waitin’ all afternoon for you slowpokes.”

They stopped dead in their tracks. Without exchanging a single glance, they turned around in a single swift and synchronized motion; the human instinctively thought of pointing menacingly her trusty crowbar as a means of self-defense to keep any assailant at bay, only to remember that she had dropped it long ago and that similarly, Sans’s temporary replacement for it was gone as well. So she basically pointed nothing other than a pair of empty arms that quickly reconverted into a ridiculous pseudo-karate chopping gesture. As if she had ever learned actual karate at any point in her life, instead of just being influenced by lousy movies that really want to see you die in battle upon realizing that their tricks are not going to work in real life.

Fortunately for them, the monster they encountered was, or at least looked, far from hostile. In fact, it appeared to be an old turtle man who barely just walked out of whatever place he had been until then, pushing the drapes out of his way on both sides like an actor who just made his way on the stage and past the red curtain, ready to address the audience; from both sides of a certain wall.

It was the infamous Hammer of Justice’s time to shine, and he seemed to have absolutely no care in the world for his role and lines. Already blaming the protagonists for being late on their cue? What does he think he’s doing?

The old man took a short second to look at the visitors up and down, assessing the damage. Then he sighed heavily. “You really did a number on yourselves, huh? Betcha kids are darn lucky you made it this far.”

“G— What…?” Thankfully the teenager had finally learned her lesson and knew better than to stupidly address him by name, for once. This did not prevent her rational mind from entering a dangerous infinite loop, however, as the same thoughts cycled at a hypnotizing rate: What the daunting heck. When did he even. How did he. Why was he. So many questions. Brain not working.

“You folks wanna live or not?!” the elderly monster hissed, opening more widely the path to where he came from and motioning it impatiently. “Quit dawdling an’ get in there before anyone sees you!”

Well, given how resisting would have done nothing but generate even more ruckus and, indeed,
enhance their odds of being discovered by someone else, Sans and Dawn soon reasoned that, after all, why the heck not.

They were already dead unless a Reset could magically save them; they could just as well wait in a calmer place... No matter how surreal this whole thing was.

How could that old man possibly know they were coming? What did he know exactly, for that matter?

On the other side of the heavy concealing curtains, they found Gerson’s shop: a dark, small cave room full of stuffy old junk mixed with masterpieces from a different time, all intertwined in a disparity of eras and economical value.

Due to the anxiety of accidentally finding and tripping on one of these relics scattered on the ground, the visitors found themselves subconsciously scanning the ground for invisible obstacles along the way. The turtle rushing them from behind did not help, but it certainly accelerated the process and pushed them into a semblance of a messy living room in barely a dozen of seconds.

Gerson locked a door behind him, closing the path and view between the main shop and this room.

Then he turned around and finally relaxed. Somewhat.

“What’re you doing standing there like a bunch’a typhas? Take a sit already! Make yourselves at home. B’sides, maybe you’ll find something to your taste in my neat collection, wah hah.” Yet another befuddled look was exchanged, but the pair soon found an old sofa in the back and complied without a word of protest. Immediately the old monster spoke again, while his face was hidden in the middle of a dark kitchen closet. “Tea or juice?”

Sans finally found in him the courage to talk back. “l-look sir, it’s nice of you to offer but we’re not interested. we’re kinda in the middle of something, what with the king wanting us dead and our friends probably about to bite the dust. looks like you already know about that part anyway. somehow.”

“Will ya know what, I felt it was coming. I knew good ol’ Fluffybuns would snap sooner or later. He’s had so much on his plate, the poor guy. An’ with that last abomination…”

Dawn shamefully shrank in her seat, looking down with chills running down her spine.

“Wasn’t talking about you, youngling. I meant the one before you. What a sight. That thing wasn’t human, I tell ya.”
He rummaged some more through his cupboards.

“...Wasn’t the first time it happened, either.”

Somehow, the tone employed in that last sentence put both visitors on edge. In what sense was he meaning that...? Given how he didn’t seem surprised at all by who they were, who knew what he could be aware of or not.

“Younglings, I’ll ask you one more time. Tea or juice?” He wasn’t going to let that go, huh? Still, he kept searching and soon his tone was lighter. “...Ooo, looks like I’ve got some cocoa too.”

Dawn jumped on that word without thinking. “C-cocoa please?” she tried to ask politely with a small sheepish smile.

Gerson finally pulled his head out of the closet and eyed her for a full second of deep silence. Then he laughed darkly. “Wah ha. Feeling fancy? Not used to the resources down here, are ya.”

The human blushed and timidly cowered again in embarrassment and guilt. Had she accidentally asked for something that would be rare or expensive or something...? Why did he offer it as an option if it was a wrong choice to take? Who did that!? “I—I— sorry, I didn’t realize it was... I-it's okay, I'll just take—”

“Shhh, don’t you worry about it. This is a special occasion after all.” he shushed her humorously, shaking his head slowly and chuckling in a deep voice. “Time will jump back soon, one way or another. Ain’t like it’s gonna matter.”

Well. Here it was. He knew.

“What about you, young man?”

“O-oh, uh... tea please. i guess?”

“Good choice. You’re gonna need all that vitality given what’s to come, wah-hah.”
That… he had nothing to reply to except for a non-committal shrug. Dawn wondered if Gerson could possibly be alluding to the “Sea Tea” consumable item’s ability to increase the consumer’s invisible Speed stat.

Still. Somebody needed to address the elephant in the room sooner or later. Now was as good a moment as any. The human gulped silently, trying to gather all her courage.

“So. Yer a human, huh? Heard you were quite different from the other ones, too. ‘specially about… a certain thing.”

Not only had the old turtle beaten her to it, but before she even had time to say anything, he was lazily pointing a clawed finger at her chest and a dim cyan light erupted from it in response, without her permission or control.

While the feeling wasn’t unpleasant, the fact that this magic grasp was somewhat hugging something that was located inside of her felt incredibly intrusive. It looked like she was the only one in the room feeling that way, though. Maybe monsters saw it differently, but… shouldn’t the action of looking at other people’s SOULs without their consent be seen as rude or anything?

“That’s quite an odd one you got there, kiddo. Clearly doesn’t belong here.”

Seriously, what was it with monsters showing her SOUL around just like that as if it weren’t a big deal? Especially if hers was supposed to be so allegedly “special”…

Thankfully, right after having said his last sentence, Gerson lowered his arm and released his grasp, and the big magic heart went back to stand invisible and immobile inside her chest like a good little puppy.

“Take really good care of it, will ya? I’m afraid if somethin’ happens to it, you’re not the only one who’s gonna suffer. Far from it.”

Yeah, and she really wished she could control all this magic weird stuff her soul was doing independently from her will. For what was supposed to be the culmination of her being, it sure sometimes acted like it had a mind of its own; that, or monsters’ influence on it was just that impressive.

Probably more by instinct than by conscious will, her hands went to shyly cover her chest, even after the giant heart hidden inside of it had disappeared from their view.

“Y-you have a l-lot to explain… sir.” she groaned defensively, refraining once more from calling
him by name. It was better not to assume that he knew too much, since the more leads they were giving him, the more likely he was to become even more cryptic. “H-how did you know? Who told you about us?”

There was first nothing but deep, enigmatic laughter. Of freaking course. That old guy sure wanted to gather every single “old wise man” trope in existence, didn’t he? Well, it was starting to get annoying. Did he want to help them or not?

“I’m afraid I can’t answer that.” he reluctantly answered, wearing an apologetic and almost sincere smile. “I get the feeling that my source wouldn’t like it if I told you.” Wait. A source? So someone else did tell him? And more than that, someone else knew!? “To be fair, I’m sure you know enough to figure that one out on your own, young lady.”

What was he talking about? Who else could possibly know about their existence and secrets without ever letting themselves known? It couldn’t possibly be Alphys or Grillby, so it had to be someone who would have been stalking them since the start? But who could have…

Oh. Ooooh. Oh please God freaking no.

“Flowey.” It hit her like lightning. Of course it was him. Who else could it have been? This was the only thing that made sense and that was self-explanatory under all possible angles, and that was saying something given how many questions this was answering all at once. “I-it. It’s him, right? H-he knows about us!”

“whoa, whoa. slow down. who you talkin’ about?”

Dawn froze in horror. Just to be certain that the skeleton was not joking, she turned her gaze towards him and stared at the lights in his sockets. When she realized that he was absolutely serious, all blood drained from her face.

“Flowey is Asriel Dreemurr resurrected without his soul after Alphys injected a golden flower with determination. He was manipulating the timeline before Frisk fell in the Underground and there’s some debate as to what exactly happened between you two but it’s very heavily implied that in the timelines when he went out to kill everyone you “caused him his fair share of Resets” and now he avoids you like the plague and kinda acts like you’re his archenemy. I think.”

Once her tirade was finished, she was not the only one in need of deep breaths. A dead silence overpowered the room, weighing on everybody’s shoulders. Sans’s eye-sockets were wider and rounder than she had ever seen them, with shockingly small pinpricks of light in the middle.

She finally took a single instant to process what exactly she had done and said in the span of barely
ten seconds, and just how inconsiderate this had been.

“Ack— S-s-sorry…!” she hurriedly shrieked in guilt. “I should’ve broken that down to you more slowly…”

Sans slowly and heavily blinked, but he quickly shook his skull. “no… no. you did good. just… gimme a minute to process that.” He closed his sockets again and raised his face towards the ceiling while leaving his hands on his lap, taking a deep breath. Then he lowered it again and buried his forehead and nonexistent nose in parallel rubbing hands, without stopping his noisy breathing. “man that’s nuts…”

Good job, dummy. Best possible way to drop the anvil.

The human judged it wise to shrink down in her seat and stay as silent as possible for as long as her friend needed to recollect his thoughts.

Gerson chose this exact moment to fetch the drinks and distribute them. Thankfully the hot drinks would help them all calm down and bring a bit more peace. As soon as Sans was given his cup of tea, he barely thanked the old turtle and immediately took a long, slow sip from it. Fortunately, it seemed to help and took effect in just a dozen of seconds.

“… i’m, uh. guessing i’m still missing out on a lot of important stuff, if that is supposed to be common knowledge to all of you.” the skeleton eventually muttered, slowly weighing his words. “i might like it better if you were more cautious the next times, but if there’s other stuff i need to learn about… i’d be grateful if you could let me know asap, yeah.”

“W-well… I don’t know what you don’t know, but. Yeah. What I just said is something that every player who’s been through the whole story or hung around the fandom for some time is supposed to know, so…” She still could hardly believe it, though. That he had no idea who the flower really was, she could figure. But that he had no idea Flowey existed altogether…? “Y-you do remember at least one timeline when you all went to the Surface, right…? I m-mean, since you know it’s possible to make it there at all…”

“i remember one time when it happened, yeah. so?”

“Then— don’t you remember him from that time? He showed up soon after you all stopped Frisk and Asgore from fighting, and before the Barrier broke.” Just after a split second of seeing the skeleton give her an unsure look and a small shrug, she pulled out her phone and quickly searched through the fanart saved in her folders. “Wait a sec— here, look at that. Sure you haven’t seen something like him before?”
Sans stared at the cartoony drawing of a yellow flower with a white smiling face on it, but no sign of recollection could be seen in his nonexistent eyes. Soon he turned his skull back towards the teenager and shook it apologetically.

“… Shit, you really don’t remember anything. How…?”

“dunno, pal. but i swear that doesn’t ring any bells.”

Oh boy. Ooh God. Holy macaroni.

“look. seems pretty obvious that we did meet at some point, even if i can’t remember.” he corrected. “it’s just that it must’ve been from before i saved my memories. before that… well. everyone’s got some déjà-vu from time to time, but i was the one who was getting the least of them from the bunch, if the one iteration that remained tells anything. and after i got to save them… i’m pretty sure that completely stops me from having any sorta déjà-vu altogether, now. whatever happened and was erased before it was saved in my program, the memories aren’t gonna come back.”

Huh… Well. Looked like his memory wasn’t nearly as complete as she had imagined, after all.

“Déjà-vu is an ability of the soul.” Gerson soon explained, breaking the silence right after he took a sip from his cup of tea. “If you keep your mind sharp and your senses open, you’ll see more. But if you cheat…” He gave a cryptic look at the skeleton, smiling darkly. “I don’t know what you did. But by shortcutting your way through time jumps… You miss out on everything the long way has to offer normally. You might end up knowing even less than what others lose and catch up on again during every loop, in the long run.”

There was a deep, humorless chuckle. “that sounded like a good idea at the time, when i did it. i really didn’t wanna forget what i learned back there.” Maybe he was remembering how he was merely parroting this sentence from someone else. “now, though… i’m not so sure. i still don’t wanna let go off those memories, but…”

“An error of the youth.” Gerson shook his head slowly, in a solemn manner. “I know it’s hard to accept, sonny, but some things are just... better left inaccessible. Knowledge like that… may not be worth throwing yer life away for.”

Despite the hot cocoa warming her heart, a cold shiver ran down Dawn’s spine when she heard that
Instantly flashbacks of a specific line of dialogue she had read a few times while reading fan theories resurfaced.

* Knowledge like that is 
the only reason I’ve 
survived so long.

The fact that this line was supposedly readable only during the Genocide Route did not help her feel any better.

She gasped in remembrance. “You already know…”

Sans raised an uneasy, still nonexistent eyebrow. “y’mean the time-travel issue? well, thing is…”

“How much do you know?” she interrupted. Then she turned towards the other monster and asserted: “You know about the video game.”

Gerson’s smile completely disappeared. He sighed. He closed his eyes. And then… He nodded slowly. “I’ve been told about it.”, he confirmed.

This brought so many huge and heavy questions. How? When? Why? Those didn’t feel like the right ones to ask.

“H… H-how much do you know?” This appeared to be as good a starting question as any. Testing his knowledge’s boundaries was supposed to be a smart strategy in order to better understand his answers to the questions that would come afterwards.

“Only what can be deduced from seein the player’s antics and various game things. They’re supposed to stay invisible for all but the players to see. Emphasis on “supposed to.”” He laughed again, then paused again; probably for no other reason than for a good old dramatic effect. “It always happens when a player’s around, or however that works. Eh, I heard that the game’s still gotta be patched somehow, like it’s still a work in progress. Can’t blame it for glitchin’ at times. Nothing’s perfect.”
Okay, what now? “W-what are you talking about? Does that happen often?”

“I can only remember clearly those that happened during this one iteration, of course. But seeing some this time around reminded me of… at least some of the previous ones.” A cryptic smile appeared, always the same, always still. “Maybe you’ll cause ’em to appear, one of these days.”

Against all odds, after a second of silence, Sans scoffed.

“What’re you saying, “player antics”? “game things”? have you even played a video game before?”

“You would be surprised.” the turtle chuckled. “Undyne is a worthy opponent.”

The subtle shifts on the young skeleton’s skull were hard to decipher, but seemed to indicate the skepticism of someone about to say “that’s not what i meant.”

“No offense, but you must be remembering wrong. i’ve been stuck in quite my fair share of time loops, and i’ve never seen anythin’ like what you’re saying.” not that you’re saying much to begin with.

“The same way you’ve never seen anything like what I said about a yellow flower?” Dawn retorted sassily.

 “… my point still stands. this makes absolutely no sense. you must be hallucinatin’ your déjà-vu or something. they hardly count as memories anyway.” The human was already opening her mouth, but: “and before you ask, resurrecting someone with determination is a huge breakthrough, but it’s absolutely plausible. whatever it is you’re on to with that “player magic” of yours, the game doesn’t work that way.”

The teenager couldn’t help but stare at him in surprise for the next couple of seconds. To be entirely honest, she had always imagined that Sans would be a lot more open-minded than that, especially regarding new, unexplainable and world-changing phenomena.

Still, she had to give him at least some credit: Gerson couldn’t possibly be any more vague with his explanations.
“It’s true that…” She started, but never finished. “What I mean is. Can’t you tell us exactly what you’re talking about? What did you see?”

Gerson immediately replied with a quick “Of course, of course.” Yet, after this, although his mouth remained half open, no other sound came out. The dangerous words he was about to utter had to never be said, for the sake of keeping things in order; and as such, a mystic, glassy veil soon fell over his unfocused eyes, and the turtle remained perfectly silent, as he was supposed to. The guests started to wonder if the old man could have fallen asleep during his reminiscing, or somehow been turned into a statue.

After almost a half minute of absolute stillness, it appeared clear that his mind had drawn a blank. Thankfully, he eventually blinked, bringing the life back in his formerly glazed look.

“… Don’t remember.” he finally answered, just as disappointed himself as he figured his audience to be. “Sorry, folks. Looks like someone ain’t too keen on lettin me tell ya.”

Wait, you’ve just been given a warning, and you ignore it already? What are you playing at?

Sans’s eye-sockets darkened dangerously, as the grip on his cup of tea warily and gradually tightened. “. . . What is that supposed to mean?”

Don’t you dare answer that one.

Gerson paused for another set of seconds, still with that empty look staring at the void. But then… He closed his eyes, smiled weakly, and shrugged. “Nothing you should worry about just yet, kiddo. You’re still young. Got most of yer life ahead of you. It’d be a shame to waste it like that. The less you know about it, the better.”

Ugh. It could have been worse, I suppose. Still, will you ever learn to shut up, old man? Trust me, you really don’t want to break that kind of fourth wall.

“As I said, I wasn’t supposed to see it in the first place. Can’t blame ’im for wanting to fix his mistakes, you know.”

Dawn felt yet another shiver run down her spine. She had no idea where this conversation was going, but she sure didn’t like it. “Who are you talking about? Your “source”…? Flowey?”
“I must apologize, kiddo. But I thought I remembered specifically telling ya that I can’t give that away.”

Okay, now this was starting to frustrate her too.

Giving vague and incomplete answers to tease them, only to give up on explaining the whole thing halfway through… it wasn’t fair!

Still, if she could gather enough clues from what he had already said so far… Some “weird video game stuff” was happening, even if they weren’t supposed to; Gerson called them “glitches”, more or less, and claimed that they needed not to be addressed because a certain someone was trying to patch things up in the meantime…

Well. This profile, too, sounded familiar.

“I see… That’s too bad.” she sighed overdramatically. “And here I thought I once heard about a certain character who’d supposedly have to patch some holes in a certain fabric… Multiple characters, in fact. All supposed to allude to the main developers and artists who created the game.”

She paused calmly, even attempting her own version of the old turtle’s cryptic smile when she sent him a sassy look.

“Fun fact, if you look at the Kickstarter’s website, you realize that originally they had created multiple dog personas for each of the main team members. In the end they only kept the one that represents Toby Fox himself, but hey, who knows. Since I arrived here I’ve been able to see quite a lot of stuff that’s hidden from the regular players. You never know.”

Ugh. Congratulations, old man. She wasn’t supposed to hear about that before at least a few more days. What a way to rush her investigation and shoot her ahead of schedule without thinking of the consequences.

Having finished her speech, Dawn crossed her arms and puffed up her chest confidently, waiting for her words to take effect. Next to her, Sans was sipping his tea again, his unsure glowing pupils lost in the void and trying to handle this newfound information.

Gerson’s reaction was… underwhelming, to say the least. The monster had closed his eyes and appeared to be deep in his thoughts; but he also was quite serene. Pretty much the contrary of what she had been shooting for.

Sans had to be the one to eventually break the silence and ask for clarifications.
“um… mind givin’ us a bit more details about that?”

The human shrugged. “Do you remember that white dog who always trolls Papyrus in Snowdin?”

“there’s… *lots* of white dogs in snowdin, pal.”

“There’s one that’s supposed to drive Papyrus crazy on a regular basis. A small Pomeranian, I think… That’s the one.” she explained. “The “Annoying Dog” is supposed to represent the creator of the game — I heard that some sprite files even call it “tobydog” or something. Anyway, in-universe speaking, the game treats it like it was “accidentally programmed” by the dog barking with text-to-speech on. I wonder if that has to do with anything. Of course we all thought it was just a joke, but… you never know. We didn’t know that the game was real, either.”

No sign of recollection came on the monster’s face. On the other hand, he looked downright skeptical regarding the human’s explanations, laughing openly at her theory.

“programmin’ a whole game with text-to-speech on? better yet, “programming” us? well, y’know what they say about the monkeys and the typewriters…” Despite him, a smugly doubtful chuckle resonated. “still. just the idea of bein’ created by a team of humans… *now*, i need to see all those religious guys’ faces if they learn one day that their god is just some dumb animal playin with a microphone.”

He seemed about to repress some more mockeries, but he was interrupted when the bookshelf on the wall behind him partially gave way, giving one of the tomes it was supporting a push just strong enough to let it fall and crash on the back of the impertinent skeleton’s skull. The cry of pain was immediate and satisfying enough as a lesson.

Instantly imagining the worst upon remembering that Sans only had “1 HP”, Dawn put her cocoa down on the table and rushed to him in panic, almost expecting him to turn to dust in the next couple of seconds.

“i’m *fine*, i’m fine!” he repeated, brushing her off but refusing to remove his hand from the back of his skull. Fortunately, it seemed that he was going to stay alive. “good thing books don’t have intent.”

Gerson watched the two visitors’ antics with always the same discreet, mischievous smile. When the panic settled down and silence came back, he sent Sans a smug look.
“There are powerful forces at work, sonny. The least you wanna do is respect them, if you wanna live long.”

The skeleton grunted annoyingly, still leaving one bony hand glued to the spot where the book had hit. “i don’t really believe in that superstition stuff, sorry. not my fault if your shelf’s broken.”

The turtle’s only answer to that was a “Oh well, I did try to warn you” shrug. Dawn’s reaction, however, was that of sudden curiosity.

“You have superstitions about this…?”

“always. lots of stuff about not angerin’ the “spirit of the angel” or hanging delta runes upside down and whatnot.” Sans sighed, emphasizing his disbelief with his quoting gestures and childish tone while citing his examples. “that one is new, though.”

“The most important ones are not necessarily the most widely spread, sonny.” Gerson stated calmly, always with the same smile. “Stories are mostly told to inspire good behavior and hope through the hardships of the day. Those that do nothing but suck out all meaning in our lives… we’re better off keeping them in the dark.”

“whatever you say.” Instead of trying to reason him, Sans gave up, as he merely bent forward to gather the book that fell and hand it back to its owner. “be careful where you put your shelves, next time. waterfall and centuries old wood are accidents waiting to happen.”

As soon as the former vendor let his eyes wander on the book’s cover, his entire face lit up like that of a child on their birthday.

“Oho…! Look what fate decided to throw at yer thick skull.” he cheered joyously. “Good ol’ Ammott. Looks like you found his old diary.”

The human frowned in confusion. “Ammott…?”

“Ammott Dinsprie. He used to be the Royal Children’s tutor, back in the day. You should definitely find some time to read it, as soon as the circumstances allow it. It’ll teach you a lot about the life in this world.”
… Huh. The more you know. To be honest, like most fans and especially because she had been surrounded by so many friends deep into the theories domain, she had always imagined that Chara and Asriel grew up at the time when W. D. Gaster was the Royal Scientist, so she would have expected that name to show up instead… But eh. “Royal Children’s tutor” and “Royal Scientist” did sound like different things, at least to some extent.

After hearing Gerson’s excitement at sharing such lost knowledge, she had expected him to hand the book over for her to read; but instead, he kept it close to his chest and, standing up from his seat, went to put it away on a different shelf, before he came back to sit down once more.

“But for now… You have enough on yer plate already. There’s no point in givin’ you that book. It won’t follow you where you’re going.” he quickly justified.

The turtle monster slowly bent backwards, making himself even more comfortable inside his armchair and taking a deep breath, as his smile expanded into pure satisfaction.

“Well… My job here is done.” he declared. “There is nothing left for you forward. Now, your only future… is backwards.”

“Yeah, I need to Reset, I know.” the human sighed. “But how do I do that? I’ve been trying for maybe an hour or something.”

“Trust your fate. Don’t force it.”

“Fate”, huh…
Even before she realized the reason why, this specific sentence once again sent chills down her spine.

* Fate finds a way.
* In life’s grand scheme, she might be why you came here in the first place...

… Damned was this game for being so darn cryptic about everything for no other reason than for being cryptic.

“It will happen when the right time comes.” Gerson added, as if no time at all had been spent
between his first sentence and this one. “… Which must be pretty soon, given how Fluffybuns’s comin’ this way.”

This last precision was dropped like an anvil. Startling, effective, and extremely painful.

“She’s—” Sans jumped out of his seat, crashing his teacup down on the table with a thundering din. “Why didn’t you tell us!?”

Gerson’s tales had been so entrancing that they had almost effectively forgotten all about Asgore. Was this his plan all along? Was this what backstabbing felt like…?!… Far from sharing his visitors’ distress, Gerson had not moved an inch.

“It was meant to happen sooner or later. This chat was nice while it lasted, but… The show must go on.” the turtle stated serenely. “An’ that’s why I trust the providence that you’ll do just fine.”

“providence my butt.” the skeleton sputtered angrily.“dawn, we need to go right now.”

The teenage girl was right behind him and did not need that implied order to decide what had to be done; she had immediately extended her hand towards him, and he promptly took it in his, ready to warp their way out.

Just before they left, the crafty reptile had one last warning to give, cryptic and unhelpful as ever:

“You’re lucky that time’s on your side. It has your back for now… but don’t act like you own it. Trust me, you don’t.”

To be fair, Sans hardly listened to it, and was already far away by the time Gerson was done. Not that it fazed the old turtle at all, for that matter.

Diving even further into his armchair, however physically possible it was, he closed his eyes, took a sip from his cup of tea, and gave out one last, disillusioned sigh.

“Hah… Poor girl. She won’t last a week.”

“Wow. You sure changed the record fast, didn’t you?”
Without opening his eyes, one eyebrow went up.

“Oh, you’re still here? I thought you’d wanna follow after them. Aren’t they the main focus?”

Somewhere between two small rocks, the earth trembled a bit and a yellow flower emerged.

“I was going to, but then I thought we needed to talk, after all those fairytales you told them.” he groaned. “You old fool. That wasn’t part of the plan.”

“I didn’t tell them what’s right. I told them what they needed to hear.” the old turtle muttered. “I thought that’s what you wanted me to do. Keep them alive longer.”

There was a funny, but empty snort.

“Funny of you to think that I’m doing this because I want to.” Flowey countered. “I know what to do to survive. Not crossing the game’s will is “How to Be Left Alone and Alive” one-o’-one.”

Gerson hardly blinked, stolid.

“How did you even pull that off? I can’t believe you remembered that much just by looking at her.”

“Don’t remember nothin, boy. You’re the one telling me all that yer thinking. Ain’t my fault if you’re no good at keeping secrets… Young Prince.”

He scoffed. “This is the first time this happened— You shouldn’t be getting any déjà-vu!”


The young flower’s face crunched up in annoyance mostly; also in a different kind of feeling that he forcefully tried to hide, but that almost appeared to be apprehension.
“You talk too much.” he warned in a threatening, but winded voice.

“I’m old. Way past the age when I can say whatever I want.” the elder bragged proudly. “I’ve lived and seen for far longer than I should’ve. Death can come an’ get me. See if I’ll care.”

“Falling down should be the least of your worries, if you had any care for this world.”

A bark of laughter erupted. “Look who’s talking! Now I’m gettin’ empathy lessons from the likes of you? That’s rich.”

“I don’t care what happens to you, but you should. Your fate’s tied to that brat, just like everybody else.”

“I have nothing to do with that one personally. I know you don’t either.” He took another sip. “Only thing I got any interest in is that lil’ game of yours. How yer still thinking it’ll lead you somewhere at the end. Let me tell ya, son. It won’t.”

By this point, all traces of apprehension had disappeared. Only annoyance remained.

“Shut up, before I make you.”

“Wah-hah. Don’t you have anything better to do than give the old guy a lecture? I bet your little protégé’s in a tricky situation right now. Shouldn’t you make sure she makes it out alive? It’d be a shame for her time to end so soon.”

Gerson’s cryptic smile showed up one last time, as his eyes scanned the little flower without fear.

“We both know who’s more deadly in the long run, between you and Fluffybuns.”

“Oh, you think I’m a threat?” the child cackled. “Didn’t you hear what that brat said? Some people here got to keep things in check. I wouldn’t wanna cross them if I were you.”

“Yes, yes, right you are.” Gerson shrugged. “Now go before Asgore kills her for good, ya knucklehead. We all know they won’t make it without the right push.”
“On my way.” Flowey rolled his eyes in exasperation. “How’s that tea coming along, by the way?”

The tea cup was barely a fraction of an inch away from the turtle’s mouth, when he stopped in the middle of his action. He took an instant to appreciate the still warm steam that kept raising peacefully from the hot beverage and caressed his beak and beard. A nice, yet barely absent flowery smell was lifted in the air, while small vibrant specks of gold disappeared and dissolved among the originally intended components around it.

Buttercups.

Why, it had been so long since he had seen this accursed, poisonous color. Gerson raised a silent, unsurprised but still somewhat disappointed look, back at his interlocutor. Maybe the fact that he did not lose face and that shock did not appear in his expression, not even for a single second, was the last straw.

“I hope you’ll have enough time to choke on that before the Reset comes.” the soulless flower spat. “Show’s over for you, at least. You idiot.”

How it happened doesn’t matter.

How Asgore found them within seconds after Sans landed his shortcut, doesn’t matter.

How Sans ended up trapped in one of Asgore’s gigantic paws and Dawn in the other, doesn’t matter.

How Sans found himself unable of teleporting away and paralyzed by bone-crushing, dusty pain, doesn’t matter.

These last sentences voice an opinion that may or may not be shared among a majority. Still, it is an opinion.

Just as it is an opinion to cry out that seizing and ripping out a soul out of a human’s body without properly killing them first requires so much power that it should normally be judged impossible to accomplish.

Nevertheless, it still is exactly what happened, certainly because good old Fluffybuns was starting to think that too much time had been wasted through stalling for the inevitable; the same way
writing thousands of words on black paper is if, in the end, despite all the development and revelations they tell, it all amounts to nothing because of an unsatisfying ending that leaves you with no lesson to learn, no answers to the questions that have been cruelly raised, and no happy ending for the characters you may or may not have been rooting for.

Oh, wait. You actually want to read it? My bad.

Not that you’re missing out. It’s pretty boring, really. Absolutely no drama. No meaning. Just, plain and brutal.

Dawn was firmly held by a giant pawed hand, almost twenty feet up in the air; all by courtesy of having landed in one of the bedrooms in the upper floors of MTT Resort, only to then have a six-souls powered Asgore smash the walls separating the outside of the building from its inside, whether horizontal or vertical.

Just by seeing the King’s face… It pained her to see him; she wondered whether he really was just angry enough to fully disregard the consequences his actions could have, or if, as Gerson mentioned… He had merely but fully snapped, one way or another. Could the six souls have had an effect on his mind or sanity? Asgore’s expression was similar to blind rage, not…

A new kind of pain shot through her chest and broke her train of thoughts entirely. Whatever was happening, it felt like something had taken a hold on her soul, but in a much more tangible way than what Sans’s blue magic felt like. Some foreign but physical influence was actually grasping her soul from within, and trying to pull it out by force. Worse: it definitely felt like it was working.

She couldn’t do anything against it. It was the end.

The two fugitives exchanged one last horrified glance. Sans could not escape, he could not help her escape, he felt himself slowly losing his grip on reality as the horrid smell of dust was slowly engulfing him, and she was a human with absolutely no combat experience stuck facing a Boss Monster with almost as much power as a god.

She was dead. Absolutely dead. As dead as he was soon destined to be.

The King’s pull was admittedly slow, but slowly effective. As a cyan light was starting to appear at a location near, but outside of her chest, the human’s vain struggles came to a stop, as she appeared to have lost consciousness.

She was going to die. She was going to die. She was going to die.

Well, I told you it was boring. Like that’d really happen. Plot Armor is such a cheating life saver when you get your characters stuck in these impossible situations.

Sans woke up in a start. Foreign memories flashed in his skull, in complete contradiction with what his body inputs were telling him about his surroundings. As soon as the time-traveling knowledge
was done settling in his mind, he knew exactly what this meant.

This wasn’t the first time this strange sensation happened, and as such, as soon as his eye-sockets opened, he knew exactly what to do, as if by (nonexistent) muscle memory. First thing, by reflex, he jumped out of bed without a second thought. Then, his attention and field of vision were directed towards the tiny little details he had learned to look out for first: mirror, window, calendar…

Not that any of his past selves ever bothered to keep the calendar up to date, ugh. Still needed to remember to stop looking at that one because it was a stupid waste of time.

Anyway. He needed to focus. How far back did she go?

Location: His bed, his room. Snowdin Town.

Time: Judging by his pajamas and the state of the cave’s ceiling lights outside, early morning.

Date: … He always hated checking that part.

Sans opened the door of his room in a rush, then dashed to the bannister and looked down.

Papyrus raised his head in surprise, but soon a giant smile full of enthusiasm sliced his skull in half:

“Oh! Good morning, Sans! You woke up early today. There’s oatmeal for breakfast!”

Sans ran back to his room, slammed the door behind him and faceplanted in his bed.

Okay. That far back. Uuuuuuuugh.

Well. On the bright side: Papyrus was back, everybody was back, nobody would remember the past month, and they probably wouldn’t have to deal with an angry six-souls powered Fluffybuns anytime soon. Also Papyrus was back.

Now, the drawbacks: he would have to start everything from scratch. Again.

… Oh, wait. He needed to go fetch the human, too. Right.
There were a few sharp knocks on the door.

“Sans, are you alright? Do you need to talk? What happened?!”

When Papyrus entered, Sans was already gone.

As soon as Sans arrived, he found the hotel room in a much cleaner state than when he had left it. It was emptier and he felt very lucky that nobody had been booking it at that point in time; nobody was there, except for…

Dawn was lying on the floor, alive but visibly in pain. If things had happened the way he was guessing it, then she certainly had been dropped from a height of at least a dozen feet, and had understandably failed the reception due to the suddenness of Asgore’s disappearance, and to her unconsciousness. Bad luck had her land barely a foot to the left of the gigantic bed right next to her.

But. She was alive. He rushed to her, but she didn’t seem to acknowledge him. A quick look at her soul showed that it was a bit out of place and in obvious internal pain, but from what he could see with his limited knowledge and perception, he detected no serious injuries to it.

He maintained his magical grasp on her soul and tried to keep it as soft as possible, and thankfully, after about a minute or two, the human let out a tiny whimper. It was a matter of seconds before she was conscious enough to turn her head towards him and whisper his name.

“are you alright?”

“Y… Y-yeah. Kinda feels like I might’ve sprained my ankle or something, though…” She quickly added in a lower, somewhat joking tone: “And my back. And probably other things, too. Everything hurts.”

She tried to roll on her side so she could sit up, and the skeleton quickly jumped on his feet and offered his bony hand as support. She didn’t think twice and seized it firmly, trying to put the rest of her weight on her uninjured foot, then slowly putting the other down and letting go of his hand… She visibly failed to restrain a wince of pain.

The air that seethed through her teeth made Sans feel the pain for her too. That sounded nastier than she claimed.

“… Yeooooowch. O-okay, that hurts. A lot. But it’s not “atrocious hellish pain that’ll make you
“scream like a dead pig”, so, I g-guess it’s fine…? How much pain is too much pain anyway? Kinda subjective.”

Besides, as Dawn reasoned, if Sans had been stuck in numerous timelines before, he would know about pain. The poor guy.

Sans could very easily see through her euphemism, but he did not insist. Sadly for her, they had more important matters at hand; he was at least thankful that the human wasn’t going to be a whining burden.

“Anyway, what happened? And why are you wearing…” She did not feel the need to end her sentence; the mere sight of the barefooted, pajamas wearing skeleton was too much to process. The fact that the sentence “I’ll feel better yesterday” was written in a goofy font on his black tee-shirt was the main cause behind her mind shutting down, admittedly.

Sans’s already strained and worried smile suddenly melted down. His eye-sockets widened as he stared at her in shock.

“…you seriously didn’t figure it out yet?”

“I think I passed out at some point…? I missed most of the action.” she apologized with a sheepish grin.

Oh boy.

Could it be that she… hadn’t actually done it on purpose?

“well… it’s really hard for me to believe you didn’t notice when you did it, but you, uh, “reset.” back to before frisk fell down, even.”

“What…?!?” Yep, she totally hadn’t meant to.

“hey, t’was about time. i was startin’ to wonder how many death threats you needed before you’d do it. third time’s the charm, i guess? anyway i can’t say i’m not a bit upset that you sent us that far back, but we were kinda out of options back then.”
“No, Sans…” Then Alphys, Grillby— their memories…

“besides, gotta get real. if you’d let yourself die, we would’ve lost our shield against the game. i mean, since you’re not from this world, the time jumps shouldn’t affect you at all, so if you died, even going back in time wouldn’t save you, so…”

She tensed and bit her lips resolutely. “Sans.”

“it’s going to slow us down, but it’s much better than getting stuck in time loops again and not being able to progress at all. and everyone’s back and they won’t all want to kill you that hard anymore, so in the grand scheme of things, this must’ve been the best outcome for everyone, i guess.”

“Sans!”

“What?”

Right after this outburst, and after the surprise of having successfully interrupted him, the teenager found herself gulping tensely. But after a split second, she recovered and stared, her eyes filled with determined, yet terrified sparks.

This was the look of blunt honesty. Even if it had to hurt.

She inhaled sharply. “I didn’t do it.”

“T-the key is to k-keep it elevated and in ice.” Alphys assured, pacing back and forth between the loading screen on her computer and the boiler on her desk at the other end of the room. “At least that’s what they say in anime.”

Sans complied without question, securing a makeshift soaked cloth around Dawn’s entire foot and almost up to her knee, and basking it all in a bowl filled with ice cubes. The human had first attempted to convince them that she could take care of it herself, that “it’s just a sprained ankle guys, I’m not gonna die or anything”, but this was yet another battle of will that she surprisingly lost.

Or partially lost, since at least she was thankfully able to provide the obviously unaware monsters with what little medical knowledge she had.
Which wasn’t much, but *just* enough to not make things too much worse, and to prevent her monster friends from unintentionally finishing her off. Not that she ever believed her situation to be lethal in any urgent case, but with these two, she never knew. They had the best of intentions, but despite their undisputable intellectual brilliance, it was sadly obvious that their subject of research had nothing to do with keeping humans alive.

It was kind of nice to have Sans so intent on seeing her heal as fast as possible, but all at the same time, he wasn’t exactly hiding the fact that said intent had not much to do with her personally and much more to do with the fact that, as he had repeated a dozen times to Alphys, “*if she dies, it’s the end for us too.*” Whatever that meant to him.

Speaking of Alphys… It was painful. She was keeping her distance with them, she was stuttering a lot more than usual, she was both keeping and avoiding eye-contact… Alphys’s nervous looks were difficult to return. They were similar to how she used to behave during the “previous night”, when they had first met; she was much less hostile and much more frightened and confused, even though sparks of recognition still shone here and there, but…

Well, it was great to see her alive and okay. But still…

“The s-soul scan looks… I m-mean, there’s no major injury left, s-so… That’s good?”

Sans walked to the lizard’s side and stared at the screen, and although he did not seem to understand much of what he was seeing, he was contented with what he heard.

“nice. if that’s all, guess it means we just have to stay put until we’re done with the repairs.”

“You’re… going to fix your time machine again?” the teenager asked, raising a suspicious eyebrow and uneasily raising her voice due to the distance.

“Well, duh.” he shrugged. “i mean… i know i’ll have to rebuild the other one too since you brought us back to a time before i had it, but, uh… sorry, after what happened, i’m gonna want to start working on the time machine first.”

“Can’t exactly blame you on that.” she smiled weakly. “It’s okay. I understand.”

She had meant these words to be genuine… but they still felt hollow in the end. God would she miss her family.

She gulped, trying to find the strength to once more utter the question that ate her from the inside ever since she woke up. She had already been given an answer, but still… She wasn’t convinced
the slightest.

“Are you sure there couldn’t be even a tiny little chance that maybe I didn’t do it?”

Ugh. She really didn’t want to drop that one, did she?

Sans rolled his eye-lights. “kid, i already told you. i did the math over and over. there was no way i’d go as far as invite any of you guys here if i didn’t know exactly what i was doing,” he sighed. “i could scan thousands of souls from afar, and the spectrometer’s results were clear. the means of their dt level was much higher than the game’s and every single one of them would’ve done their job perfectly if they were in your place. i seriously don’t see why you’d be an exception.”

“But I was unconscious and literally on the verge of death when it happened. How could I do it?”

“you prolly just did it by instinct as a response to the stress of dying and all that.”

“Then why didn’t that happen when we were falling to our deaths in Hotland? I was trying even harder back then. That makes no sense. Don’t you find it a little weird that it happened during the only time I wasn’t actually trying to Reset? Not even a little?” she countered. “Not to mention that when I was thinking of Resets, I specifically didn’t want to go that far back, because I knew that’d erase your month of progress. Heck, I don’t even know how Resets work, but I wasn’t even sure it was possible for me to go back to a time before I showed up here at all.”

Either because she had effectively installed doubt in him or because she made him want to prove her wrong, this long rant kept the skeleton silent and thinking for a few dozens of seconds. Then he spoke again confidently:

“… tell you what. we’re already in the perfect place if we wanna measure stuff scientifically and whatnot, so if you want proof that you did it, we’ll give it to you. how’s that sound?”

“… There’s a way to check that?” Needless to say, that sounded perfect.

“Y-your soul is already f-four times stronger than it s-should be… There’s no question that this amount of d-determination should g-give you a-access to… Y-you know.” Alphys rambled uneasily.
“only thing that’s almost as powerful as that is the game’s anchor limit. you just have to score higher than that. and as i already said, that shouldn’t be a problem for you.”

The Determination Extractor Machine is such a wonder of monster technology. So ahead of its time, such a pioneering engine and source of even more advances in the study of magic…

The human’s knowledge of this machine is, as all knowledge she has of this world, broader than it should be, and all at the same time, insultingly limited. She doesn’t suspect the intricacies of its wiring, nor does she understand the full scope of the power inside her SOUL.

She enters the skull-shaped scanner, she admires and lets herself feel intimidated by its beauty and peculiar, entrancing but phobia-inducing shape, but she cannot see what is at stake and what this machine represents to the universe it is anchored in.

And now… this is where it ends. In just a few instants, the result of her SOUL’s determination level will come out. Just a simple number, for everyone to see.

Five digits that define the fate of an entire world.

She has not a single clue that, starting from this very instant… her future is sealed.

The determination level that the video game’s main influence has been proven to amount to is 42.013 kMS, as Sans had measured it times and times again in the past timelines with minute precision, to the point when he knew this number by heart and could recite it at any moment without hesitation.

Any human soul originating from the world this pseudo-Player came from is supposed to be high enough above that limit so that the most random person taken from there would still be above that score by at least two or three units; just as what Sans explained.

If the density of the population of all humans in that world were to follow a Gaussian curve, (which it definitely does not), the probability for a human SOUL to be below the game’s level would be of less than 0.5%, which amounts to one chance in twenty thousands.

All this being said… This is truly a shame.

This is such an anticlimactic end, especially after what could have been a different, much more violent ending. Both options are so unsatisfying in their own ways.

It is somewhat tragic to use a last-ditch effort to get your protagonists out of a premature ending, only to find them at the dawn of another hardly an hour later. After all, once they gain their answer
for sure, what is there to come? There is no more drama; no more surprises; not nearly as much as there has been so far, at least. She is injured, and as such, much less likely to do anything interesting for a while because nothing in this universe has any reason to push her to. Who will come to disrupt Sans’s research again?

Asgore? It would be a miracle if, even if he were told again that a human was present, he would bother to come before at least a few days.

Undyne? The human was going to be stuck at the skeletons’ house for a while, which meant that Papyrus was definitely going to be there to prevent anything dangerous from happening. Who could possibly bring any sort of drama?

Mettaton? Maybe if he learned that a human was present in the Underground then he would try to devote part of his show to that topic, but it was very likely that he would still find a way to make that show about himself instead; and even then…

That human had her good moments, but… she was fairly bland. She had not much drama potential since the start, and now that she was injured, what little stunts she could have pulled in the past day are now out of the window until she heals. She has no more potential to bring for this story. She has brought the end. She…

\[41.972 \text{ kMS}\]

… doesn’t have enough? Huh.

Well. Now that changes everything.

Act 1 — Don’t Let Him Find Out

\[END\]

Read via Screenshots Here (full formatting but may encounter loading issues)
Chapter Notes

This chapter is terrible, especially the end. I'm so sorry for taking so long. The good news is that at least this chapter is over with and the next one is done almost halfway through so chances are it'll come out either next week or the one right after. I still hope you'll be able to at least enjoy this a bit, despite its lack of quality and meaning compared to the previous ones ;-;

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Learn When to Quit

The Prompter Echoes

2016, May 2nd

OST: Reminiscence ~ Ante Matter 2016

» Read the PDF version here! «

» Read on tumblr here! «

This is the main index where you can choose which way you wish to read the chapter.

Read via Screenshots Here (full formatting but may encounter loading issues)

Read Plain Text Here (formatting limited to what AO3 can do)
Steven D. Kaplan, nineteen years old, also known as Windows Gulim, administrator of the Time Machine Forum and its multiple satellite servers on various planets, was concerned. Concerned as in, lying awake and staring into his bed since the very moment he tried to lay down a few hours earlier. He simply could not let go. He could not forget the events he and his friends had witnessed; it was too sudden, too nonsensical... too heartbreakingly sad.

In all honesty, he was not a close friend of Dawn’s. She was among the most recent members on his server, and although she was Lys’s best friend, they simply did not have that much in common besides that and Undead’s—

Still... She was Lys’s best friend, as well as, from what he knew at least, her only true friend outside from the server. As much as he had tried to keep Lys company everything seemed to simply be not the same; she could not just forget her, and he could obviously not replace a lifelong friend.
her, and he could obviously not replace a lifelong. That, and... When said lifelong friend seemingly everyone by running away on her own, or when the guilt of feeling like Lys was the one betraying first place... He could only imagine how much it could not fix something like that. That was too much.

Heck. He could not even meet with Lys face to face with her living literally on the other side of the world. He loved Australia and he had dozens of friends around him, but when it came to how much he interact with Lys... The isolation and technical difficulties resulting from the distance and time difference was unbearable. And yet, despite that, he still could not say no. Powerless as he may be, he knew that Lys needed...

His phone vibrated. In a split second, it was in his hands displaying the new message he had received:

Lys the Doppler Effect Flower

online

I'll see you after my maths class.

If you're still up by then of course. I hope you won't be actually. Please sleep.
Haha x) I'll try to sleep yeah... Are you sure? You'll be fine though?

I'll be okay, don't worry. As okay as math can be anyway. Hopefully it'll distract me from all this mess for some time.

Yeah, for now I guess that's all you can do.

I'll keep my phone close just in case. Please let me know if you need to talk.

Steven, are you awake?

Called it. He knew she would want to talk. Finally a reason to do something productive and insomnia to good use.

Yeah. How are you doing?
... Wait, what? Seriously?
In the span of a dozen of seconds, Steven had plug his headset in and started a vocal call. Lys immediately.

“Great, you’re here. So, are you ready for a dump right now?” Well, she certainly did not any second and dove into the sauerkraut right.

What a girl.

“I guess, yeah. It’s three a.m., but now that I said that I can’t just hang up now. What happened?”

There was a quick snort, but it was soon repressed. he could only imagine was his teen friend attempt maintain an Absolutely Serious face, full Film Noir. He could hear street noises and strong, resolute figure. Apparently she had not even waited to settle down, had sent him her messages right after leaving high.

“So. You remember how it went yesterday after she vanished, however that happened. Her mom, flyers and all that while Charlie and I gave testimonies. Nobody saw anything though, so
the only one who could really give them any leads. A chronological reconstitution of what we know:

“I still can’t believe nobody noticed anything. Really that sneaky?”

“Well, Charlie said he heard something weird. We went to knock on her door to ask if she was home, so I guess not; but as soon as he entered, she was already gone.” A quick pause. “She wasn’t sure, but she sure was fast. The ‘premeditated’ kind. And that’s where nothing makes sense.”

“Because it sure as hell wasn’t premeditated. From her tone alone, he could easily deduce what reasoning was going. That, and, although he didn’t know Dawn all that well, he surely knew Lys and regarded her best friend.

Dawn and he had drifted apart soon after meeting because apart from the topics of Lys and Under, hardly had any common interests. Besides, he had stopped talking to her about Lys since every time he attempted to bring up the subject, she would start these stupid clichéd jokes and laugh at those clichés. “awww” (ironically) and call them her OTP (unironically). He did not need that kind of annoyance to plague especially not when his real-life college buddy
class were already doing their part and would let him hear the end of it anyway.

Still. Dawn could be annoying. Dawn could be smart and self-conscious about lots of instinctual behaviors. She could be crafty and a bit of a pratt, times, when she was in the right mood (that certainly Joshua’s bad influence).

But: she was not a liar. She was not manipulating as hell cared about her friends. No matter how and sullen she could get when people turned against her she would never pull something like this on anyone, let alone Lys. If a plan were behind her disappearance such plan would have needed to be so elaborate, inconsiderate... There was no way in hell she could have thought it through, let alone pulled it off. She definitely have sought some sort of “revenge” “betrayal” by “blackmailing” her, but her revenge have been on the exact same level as what led to her disappearance for no reason and making every single person she knew worried sick for her well-

Whatever had happened, it was certain that Dawn was in a normal state of mind at that moment. Or...
were missing something deeper, that could better explain the contrast between her pre-disappearance and the strange and seemingly impossible act she would have led to the resulting events.

“Exactly.” Lys answered, always in her Serious voice. “She said that we’d see her “in a few minutes” and then she was gone. Was she lying? Had she already prepared her escape that way? It’s not something she’d set up— and even if it were, that still doesn’t answer the most basic question: I mean, how even **do** it?! Even the police has no idea which floor she went to just **leave her room.** Her flat’s bloody **fifth floor** for fuck’s sake!” Another draught of air pause supposed to hide the fact that she needed to breathe, and then: “But that’s not even the best part.

“I’m listening?”

“I’m saying that we don’t know how she did it as far as the hints we’ve found show, it was **impossible** for her to leave without being noticed. Her mom was in the living room so there’s no way she could’ve left through the front door, and **that** exit’s out of the way, all other options leaving the flat are of the same level of highly unlikely. Jumping out of her window and **magically managed to live another day** which has no way in hell of happening.
out there, which has no way in her or happy.

You see what I mean by that?”

“She must’ve found some other way...?”

“We’re stuck with a *fucking locked room mystery* is what’s happening.” Lys gritted between her teeth.

“There’s the theory that since it could’ve been ‘premeditated’,” (he could literally hear the quotes and eye-roll just in her voice, wow) “she left the room much sooner than we thought that then she sent those last messages from her phone, once she was already far away. But in that case, that doesn’t explain why Charlie wouldn’t have heard anything, if by that time she was already far away. So, that idea’s out of the way.”

“Hmm. I’m guessing that if the police didn’t find anything that could’ve helped her escape the room, it means they didn’t find anything she could’ve made that noise after she left, either.

“Her laptop was the only thing that could’ve made any sound because we couldn’t find her phone and it was muted. So, nope, nothing.”

“How about her run...? I thought you said she launched Undertale on it.”

“It was, but she didn’t do anything on it. Fri...
still on the bed of flowers and didn’t move there.” she quickly explained. “I checked her just in case— turned out she’d started the game in Hard Mode.” There was a weak snort... “Turns out she really had a surprise for us after all.”

Steven frowned. “If she did start to play and planned to prank us with it, why did she leave?”

“Well. That’s where the breakthrough comes.

The footsteps paused for about a dozen of seconds, probably as she was waiting for a traffic light to turn green.

When they started again, they were resolute as a crowd.

“Nobody was around at the time, so nobody she leave. We concluded from that that since she was alone and locked in her room, then she was the only one who could’ve done something to leave, right?”

We were the only witnesses, if we can even call ourselves that — we interacted with her the night before she disappeared, but we couldn’t see what happened. She left somehow, without leaving a note and without the intention of leaving anything behind.

“because what kind of person running away want to be found, right?” The grin that appeared on her face was practically audible. “Or so we thought.”

Wow. Was she saying that they had found n...
Wow. Was she saying that they had found prints somewhere else had been in her room at some point?

“Wait, so the police found fingerprints or that?”

“Ha, no, not a chance. There’s still no concrete evidence that anyone else was there at the time.” In another instance, her voice had jumped from confident and sure, to suddenly dejected and uncertain: “But. Something happened. You’ll never guess.”

As much as he enjoyed hearing her so determined and active after almost twenty-four hours of near-laziness and near-depression, her game started to feel a little too long. Steven’s eyelids chose that moment to painfully remind him how tired he was. “It’s three-fucking-thirty a.m. here. Just tell me already.”

“Charlie got a fucking video call from you-know-who...”

... Does. Not. Compute.

No but in all seriousness, she had lost him. When? How? Why???

“... The fuck?” was the only question his crumpled face managed to voice.

“I know, right!?!” The only reason Lys had not told him was because she told him to.
shouted was, he guessed, because she was out on the streets and that although he was certain that people might have gotten a few stares from random bystanders, she still wanted at least to avoid making some sort of scene or just be viewed as a complete weirdo. She quickly added: “And better yet, guess what she sent me a PM. Here, wait a sec—I’ll show you.”

Without hanging up, he quit the window for the moment and waited for any kind of notification to show up on the phone. Just about a minute later, here went a screenshot:

Pineapplup

Hey! Finally able to tell you what happened yesterday when I disappeared whatever. You wouldn’t believe me if I told you but this is HUGE. I’m really sorry I couldn’t read your messages earlier.

Hardly five seconds later, Lys spoke again.

“Are you done reading?”

“Yeah, just a sec—yeah. She... didn’t finish it?”

“ wasn’t that ominous as all hell.

“Nope. Looks like a finger got stuck on a few words at the end for some reason, like if she took a screenshot on her phone and had to hide it from view quick...
example. And after that, she sent that draft without correcting or finishing it.”

“... Like if she was in a hurry.”, he found himself thinking out loud. And when he said “hurry”, he meant “hurry” as in, of course, way more than just in a rush.

“And better yet? I tried to send her a few messages — texts, Discord, WhatsApp. My WhatsApp messages are marked as “sent” not “delivered.” Which means that it’s not only that she didn’t read them — it’s that her phone can’t receive them. Either it’s turned off or she moved to a place without any reception or something.”

None of these options were good signs, especially given the implications of their previous deduction as to why she would send an unfinished message. Still, the part that was bothering him was that the casual tone in her PMs was meant to imply that she had (or at least she thought she had) the time in the world to write as long a letter as she did, and yet, very quickly, her message was cut short. What kind of situation would make her think she had time for long enough to write a long and detailed explanation only to prove her wrong before she had any time to add anything of actual significance? That did not make sense.

“Either way. Dawn calls Charlie, she sends him a message that she doesn’t get to finish and she...
message that she doesn’t get to finish, and after she can’t receive anything from us? Sounds as if she was trying to tell us something “huge”, I said, but that something else stopped her.”

Besides himself, Steven gulped. Images of the worst movie scenarii flashed in his mind.

“So... What do we do?” he quickly asked, in a much less manly than he would have preferred.

“You still didn’t guess where I’m going?”

... Knowing her, that was not reassuring to the slightest.

“... Aren’t they busy with loads of police guys and investigating the place or something?” he tried to assure Charlie already told them everything about the call. You can go to the police and tell them Dawn’s text, but you should leave her family alone.

“But he’s seen her!” she pleaded. “Maybe if I’m enough I’ll see him before they interrogate him.

Lys. What the fuck are you doing. No. Bad. Be smart.

“Oh... Didn’t the police tell you something? Letting them do their job in peace or something because they’re the professionals and you’re not.”

“Oh, yeah. I’m not a relative and the police already checked my flat and my stuff just in case I could...
helped her escape or something. They could see that I’m no longer relevant to the case and I shouldn’t interfere.”

If anything, the footsteps he could hear sounded like they were speeding up. Steven sighed, carefully removing his glasses, and face-palmed, letting his hand slowly all the way down his face.

“You’re gonna ignore them and investigate anyway, aren’t you.”

“Totally.”

That single word was imbued with unquestionable authority and the confidence that she was undoubtedly right, despite the obvious existence of the case. The case existed for no other reason than to protect her own recklessness. It was such a shame that when he disagreed with the authority she had to act like she had her own personal laws to follow instead...

That girl was so incredibly crazy. Why did she have to give him a heart attack because she’ll build her own wall and fly herself to space like if it’s no big deal or so

“Dude. Don’t get in trouble, ‘kay?”

“The police left her room ages ago, they’re not coming back. They think she’s probably in another...
gonna mind! They think she ran away, they worry about what she left behind in her room they’ve already done it yesterday. They didn’t do anything wrong, so they’ve got no reason to think that they’ll ever find anything wrong with it. I mean, a teen’s room after all.”

He strongly disagreed on a lot of levels, but he knew no matter what anyone could tell her, not a single person in the universe would be able to change her mind.

“And hey, let’s be real. It’s a “teenager ran from home” case, not a murder case. They’re supposed to focus a lot more on the outside than the inside. He honestly knew too little about US police procedures care about retorting anything to that.

“Besides. Since when was Phoenix Wright allowed to investigate his crime scenes?”

Oh boy. No. “… Lys, this is real life. Not Ace Attorney.”

“I’ve played these games since I was six years old. Ace Attorney is my life. Objection overruled. I could practically hear her smirk when she was saying that, and that only made him face-palm once. Then she added: “Also, I’m gonna need a sidekick.”

“Oi. I’m older. Why do I have to be the sidekick?”
"Cause it’s hard for a detective to do any real good when he’s stuck thousands of miles away from the crime scene?"

"... Touché." He didn’t know whether it was due to the ungodly hour and his sleeplessness or if he had just wanted to goof off with her, but only then did he realize that he was playing along. As soon as he found his reason to do so, however, he did not nearly as much. "Besides, you’re right. I should be your sidekick. Sidekicks are the ones who keep the detective grounded and stop them from getting too much trouble." He paused for a single second, just long enough to could smile sassily: "... Whether with exterior force or because they get their head stuck up their ass, we forget how reality works."

She snorted. "Dumbass."

He smiled. "I’m trying."

They kept chatting for another dozen of minutes, until she announced that she was about to arrive at Dawn’s place. He needed to hang up, if only temporarily. Steven sighed heavily.

"Look, I know it’s already too late, but are you sure you should bother them now? I’m sure they’re all tired..."
with lots of other stuff.”

“Steven. I’m bringing info they’re gonna want to see. And I want to clear things up.” she retorted. “But I’d like to check on them, too. I’m worried about mother, especially.”

This had him pause for a few painful seconds. He didn’t like the sound of that last sentence.

He dared to ask. “… What about her mother?”

“Well, how can I say this…” She clearly wasn’t asking. “Just picture Toriel, I guess. Kinda.”

He raised a pair of skeptical eyebrows. “What do you mean by that? You mean the mother hen side, the ‘will shoot fireballs at you if you try to leave’ side?”

“The side where… Well, let’s say she’s had some sad moments in her life. If Dawn doesn’t give up quickly, I think there’s good reason to worry about her too. That’s why Charlie didn’t go back up yesterday. To keep an eye on her and make sure she’s not alone. Not that their dad approves, guess they thought it was better for Charlie to have a few days of college than him slacking off from his...”

… Oh boy. That side. Yikes.

“Do you… know what happened?”
Do you... know what happened?

“You never wondered about the age gap between her children? Dawn’s pretty young compared to Charlie, don’t you think?” she asked somewhat rhetorically. “Well, eight years isn’t that much, but... That didn’t sound good at all. “What happened?”

“Dawn should’ve had an older sibling.”

He froze. Then shuddered. There was no need for that.

“Yeowch.” Very eloquent and tactful. Wow.

“Yeah. What you said.” Apparently she didn’t have any better words to describe her thought on that situation herself. “Anyway. We all, just don’t want her to lose another child, right? And don’t want her to... well, I’m not sure what she or wouldn’t do, but let’s not take any risks. Bringing her some news on the case will at least give her some hope.”

That... certainly was a much better motivation for checking on them and tell them what she knew of it. He still didn’t approve of her possibly going against the police’s recommendations because it could do nothing but slow everyone down, but... He could understand the frustration and pain that came from being helpless and to do nothing to save them.
dark as to what was going on.

“One last thing.” Steven added firmly, but also a speck of hesitation. “If things do get serious. You’re gonna get into this seriously too, right?”

“Well duh.”

Yeah, pretty much what he feared. “Remember Isabel said, okay? At least she’s got a sister and parents in the force and they’ll know what to do.”

There was an angry huff. “I don’t need to involve them. It’ll only bring more trouble.” was her immediate response. To be fair, he kind of agreed that both girls in a single conversation unsupervised was the best and fastest way to reinstate the Corp in a matter of seconds, and possibly induce the US into World War soon after.

Everybody on the TVF forum and servers knew to leave both BlueDoppler and Calliope Quill in chatroom or forum topic for more than forty-two hours. Those who weren’t enjoying the drama and brought metaphorical popcorn and 3D-glasses knew to teens’ wrath. In retrospect, it was still kind of hilarious nobody knew how it started, and that whenever one or other was asked about it, it was clear that even they couldn’t remember at all when or why they started.
each other’s throats and that asking them this was hurting their pride because they were very well that they weren’t able to answer it properly, meant the only logical conclusion out of this was that they was absolutely meaningless and pettily stupid.

Speaking of Cold War, he started to wonder what would be the equivalent of each country. The two both American, both buttheads in their own way.

He remembered that Dawn had once found a trope for their case. “Academic Alpha Bitch” was the unagreed upon name for this type of character. The definition was something along the lines of “feminist freak obsessed with having the best grades in class.” At least so far, he had to admit that it was accurate girls: Lys was into science, Isabel into literature, and philosophy/psychology-related subjects. They both top students in their own fields, and yet compete with each other on a truly intellectual level.

In most, if not in all media he knew, there only one character of that type at any given time in the series, or at least if a second one were to appear, was a one-time only.

It was easy to realize why the universe was certain to function so that there could only be one “Alpha same location at any given time, for the sake of
intact or not disrupting its balance or something. deal with two of them on a daily basis, with both unable to compete in any regular field... It might whenever they disagreed on one thing (and they disagree a lot), they needed to find something to go on, no matter how childish or blatantly irrelevant an actual topic it was. Chaos and madness inevitably.

Still. Nobody with an iota of common sense would them “rivals” unless they had a death wish.

He sighed, having anticipated Lys’s pretty reasonable reaction (for once). But still, since she was going to get in trouble either way... He had to make his point:

“I’m pretty sure you do. It’s better to involve him to go in blind and get in trouble because interfering with the force. She definitely knows that neither you nor I know about how to handle.

There was a long, cold pause. Swiftly, Lys muttered “I’ll see you later”, then hung up. Welp. He had the seeds, now all he had to do was hope that she made the right choices... rationally.

His options were now to either wait until she did call again, or listen to his exhaustion and go back or go to sleep, period. He still didn’t feel like he able to actually close his eyes and drift away until
came, though, so the “choice” was quickly taken. After all, he never was a quitter. Even when it might be the best choice for the sake of his good health... He could bring himself to let down someone in need. Unless he was proven explicitly that doing so would lead to the best outcome in the long run, he could never...~

Was it pushing it too far? Maybe. But she had to look at the current situation from the right perspective. She wanted to be efficient, she needed to be clear-headed and everybody had to find the truth one way or another. What was the one thing that taught her how to solve the mysteries and solve cases? The Ace Attorney games were far from perfect, especially regarding the dubious nature of some of the situations, but there was one thing nobody could deny: these games ruled. And they taught kids how to use their brains instead of jumping to conclusions was at the very least something. Well, maybe not kids. She was probably the only one who got to play this game as a kid. But she was thankful.

Critical thinking was the best thing for an individual to develop, as early as possible.

So what if these games weren’t suited for her youth? She survived and came out stronger.

(Maybe Dawn didn’t, though.)
(Maybe Dawn didn't, though.)

So what if the concept was ridiculous if anybody stupid enough to want to apply it to real life. Who cares? Her best friend since third grade was the victim, and she was going to solve it no matter what, the way she knew how.

She wouldn't have to actually shout the words out loud that the game mechanics would apply in real life, like a complete lunatic. All she had to do was inside her mind, that this was how things could be, it was a nice and engaging way of classifying the world.

This would calm her and bring her to a situation relate to, so she would be equipped to solve it with a cool head and a clear, acute mind. The logic was what mattered.

Lys took one last, deep breath... then knocked. Sure enough, the answer came fast; even more surprisingly, the answer was actually the mother herself.

“Oh... Good afternoon, Amaryllis.” She had a but genuinely comforted smile. Apparently, one for a visit could at least do that much on its own.

Normally she would have rolled her eyes and joked her that she didn’t have to call her by her full name, that everybody had stopped doing so a
But... this time, she let it slide. It wasn’t like it mattered too much.

“I’m not coming at a wrong time, am I?” she said politely. She had planned to pay them a visit, no matter the circumstances, but you never knew.

“No, no. Of course not. Don’t worry, you’re always welcome here. You know that by now, don’t you?”

The tone wasn’t there, but the warmth in her voice betrayed the fact that she had actually tried to lighten the mood with a small joke of sorts. It wasn’t really the case, but that was a start. At least her case wasn’t as desperate as she had feared.

“Just making sure.” she shrugged absent-mindedly before entering and closing the door behind her.

The mother wordlessly guided her towards the living room, even though the teenager knew the place like the back of her hand. She offered her a glass of orange juice, having asked her preference because she had known her nearly a decade. Then...

“Amaryllis, dear...” She took a long, breathless

“I can’t understand. Everybody says this is a moment in children’s lives when they want...
moment in children’s lives when they want independent, or rebel, but…”

*It wouldn’t be Dawn’s style. She would never straightforward,* Lys thought for herself.

“You’re her best friend. You two are inseparable. You’re a teenager, too, now. So is there anything you think you can understand what— what she would do something like this...?”

They still believed that Dawn had run away on her own volition. She should have expected, and yet, it still surprised them. They would jump to conclusions like this. The fair solution should be to tell her what she had to, that she was wrong; that Dawn had not abandoned her. But despite her entire body shaking with the urge to do something, she found herself wondering if this really was the thing to do, at least for now. After all, she really didn’t have that much proof, in the end. She had really just one clue: the fact that Dawn had been too contact them at all, and how nonsensical it seemed. It was enough proof to convince somebody who knew Dawn well enough, and it was definitely enough to convince someone in her family. But it probably wasn’t enough to convince the police just yet; it was enough to shake some doubt, but what would they do after...? Even if she could prove that Dawn had been kidnap-
Even if she could prove that Dawn had been kidnaped with that little piece of evidence she had at this point, there was no way of identifying who the kidnapper was. From any of the clues they had gathered so far. There was no way of locating Dawn, especially now that her phone was out of reach.

The question that came after was... What good could it do to a mother to tell her that her daughter had not run away, and that it was a kidnapping? Just looking at her face, she was broken enough as it was. Heck. For all she knew, that single piece of evidence could be taken a completely different way — they could claim that Dawn had run away on her own, and that she had been abducted while she was already far away. That would perfectly explain why not a single trace of a kidnapper or outsider could be found in her room.

In the end, Lys found herself mumbling the first thing that came to her mind in order to answer the question: "I don’t know. But we’re gonna find out..."

Steven jolted back to consciousness when his phone started ringing and buzzing on top of his sleeping bag. Apparently he had actually dozed off... Surely, he had taken her time to have some regular banter with her instead of jumping right into business. That was re
As usual, it was a WhatsApp call. Only when he did he realize that contrary to the last, time this was a video call.

_Glob damn it, Lys. You’re lucky I got dressed._

Second surprise, what he could see on the screen setup of Lys and Charlie sitting face to face, was facing the phone’s camera. From what he could get, the phone had been placed horizontally on a table or in such way that it was forming a perfectly equilateral triangle along with Lys and Charlie’s positions.

Much less surprisingly, Lys was confidently sitting on a chair, her legs crossed, her spine straight, and with pen and notebook in hand and ready to use. She didn’t seem to pay any attention to the camera, instead fully focused on the tall guy that was going to be her future “partner.” Not a question; for that, he was thankful. She probably loaded the video only so he could see the scene, not the opposite. He quickly deactivated the video side, gaining full view of the scene that was occurring in the same time, but just about nine thousands miles away from him. Neither of the two Americans spared a small glance and given a small wordless nod, it was supposed to mean either “Smart move,” or “The
supposed to mean either. Smart move, right? I won’t be distracted by this 4AM face all the way seriously dude just go find a hobby or go to sleep going to be the death of you one of these days, shirt is stupid.” All things considered, it probably

On the other side of the planet, yet at the same very close thanks to the wonders of technology, Lys her tongue in order to bring all the attention back

“So. We all have context, and we all know what doing here. Any questions before we begin?”

“Just one thing.” Charlie went up immediately “I advised Mom to go take a nice nap so she won’t get involved. So don’t go do any crazy stuff, but she needs her sleep. Got it?”

“Understood.” the teen girl nodded firmly.

“Trust me, you don’t want to see my roommate four a.m. I’m all for not waking him up either.

“Good. Good.” There was a pause. Then another pause. Charlie pursed his lips awkwardly and towards Lys. “So, uh, what are you waiting for?

“Dawn called you, right?” the girl answered serious shrug. Yes, a serious shrug. Don’t ask how he pulled that off. “We just, want to know what s and how it went, in as many details as possible
let you talk, we won’t interrupt, and then we share our thoughts when you’re done. Is that good?

“Um. Okay, sure.” Charlie sent a questioning look at the phone’s camera, but he obtained from her no other answer than a silent non-committal response, with a somehow audible eye-roll.

Lys smirked in anticipation, readying her pen and her notebook closer.

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**Witness Testimony**

-- Dawn’s WhatsApp Call --

So actually, I’m the one who called. I was stalking her Discord because literally nothing better to do besides looking after my Mom.

And then at some point there’s a small thing— you know, the green thing that goes up and proves that she’s online for the first time since she vanished.

She rejected the first call. But the second time I tried, she answered.
immediately. She must’ve already got her phone in her hands...

I have no idea why she’d reject the first call on purpose and then pick it up the second time, though.

Maybe I took her off-guard. She looked like she hadn’t meant to answer the second one either.

Charlie seemed to reach a pause, so Lys signed his name...

Judging by the black and messy state of her notebook, she had gathered enough data already to at least discuss what they had heard so far, and she was planned on hearing the rest later.

For the time being, it was time to dig and read and re-read the lines in order to see if there couldn’t be something more Charlie had inadvertently left out.

Like the games often repeated, witnesses did not always lie consciously. Charlie wouldn’t lie when his sister was at stake. But memory was a funny thing, and answers were easy to make; that, and it was just as easy to mention the tiny details when you genuinely thought they’re irrelevant... while they might be game changers.

That being said. It was time to get to the interest...
“Okay so, first off.” Lys started. “What time was the call?”

“Around ten, I think?” Charlie pulled out his phone and clicked a few virtual buttons, then continued, “Hm. The call started at ten thirty-four. Guesstimated, of course.”

The teen scribbled down all the additional information. “The call lasted for about seven minutes, then it ended.” She did not feel like she was truly able to deduce any specific meaning behind it, but she felt like there just had to be something to it... Just maybe.

“There’s something I don’t understand.” Steve spoke up soon after, audibly confused. “Dawn didn’t want to contact you?”

“She sure didn’t look at ease. She kept giving me those worried looks, you know, the one she sends over whenever she’s looking for someone’s approval or something.” Charlie’s expression suddenly became a bit more serious. “That’s how I found out she wasn’t alone.”

There was a light, repeated noise when Lys’s phone...
There was a light, repeated noise when Lys’s palm hit her hand and on the ground, then bounced on the carpet.

“You SAW him?!”

“Quiet—!” the elder hissed in a forced whisper.

“People sleeping, remember?”

“S-sorry, but I— you— W-what did he look like? Was it a man or a woman? Did you get to see a face?”

“Lys, he just said he knew she wasn’t alone.” Charlie interrupted her. “It doesn’t mean that he got a good look.”

“Actually, he did show up on video at some point.”

“Charlie countered. “He even talked a little the video was a man. He was wearing a coat and the video quality was terrible, though. I can’t really say I got to see his face for sure.”

What came next in Lys’s mental recreation of the Attorney’s court trial was obvious and natural. She didn’t say the words out loud, but they nonetheless rested in her mind by instinct.

“What kind of costume?” This was the first question, but she had many others to ask afterwards. The
but she had many others to ask afterwards. It simply was the first one to cross her mind.

“It was a Sans cosplay. Yes, the Sans from Undertale. Pretty realistic one, too... Or at least it looked when the video quality was so low.”

Dawn being kidnapped by a guy in a Sans costume after she was trying to play Undertale...? Huh. To write that down as a coincidence, but it didn’t leave a good feeling. Maybe they would find more clues and prove that it actually was a true connection between the two.

“He talked to you?” Lys asked, not explicitly wanting to follow the question that came after but trusting Charlie to know what kind of answer she was really looking for.

“He went in when...”

Charlie seemed about to continue his sentence, but he paused and entered a somewhat tranced state of thought. Apparently he had forgotten, or maybe he didn’t understand that he needed a quiet environment to think. Lys and Steven made a wordless agreement not to say a word or even move until he could start talking. Thankfully, after about a minute of silence, the man’s efforts were successful.

“I think it was when I told Dawn that she couldn’t be kidnapped, because she wouldn’t be the one...”
me if she were. That’s— that’s when he came.

A shiver ran down Lys’s spine.

“What did he say?”

“I think he took the phone from her, and then he said something like “that’s enough”, and then...” was another silence. Charlie went back to stare into the void, deep in thought... and then a face came crashing against his disappointed forehead. I interrupted him. He didn’t speak much after that.

I think he said that we wouldn’t find them no matter how hard we tried, and he talked about California. And a mountain...? That’d explain the crappy reception.

Lys’s pen danced again on her notebook, writing down many details as she could even when she couldn’t discern the immediate relevance.

“About that reception problem.” Steven asked.

“How bad was it?”

“Really bad. The kind of bad where you’d expect a call to start lagging and lose connection entirely every second. It didn’t, but it really had trouble keeping its signal up, especially when Dawn went up the st
“She could walk around freely?” Lys asked, surprised.

“Yeah. It looked like they were in a basement when the call started, but at some point Dawn woke up and came outside. She took the stairs and ended up in a living room, I think. Charlie paused again, once more trying to get his facts straight. ‘She told me something about how she didn’t want to stay inside, though. How she’d be dead if she went outside, though. How she’d be dead if she went outside.’

“So she was restrained.”

“She was pretty chill for someone who wanted to believe she was kidnapped.” the elder deadpanned. “She said lots of crazy stuff, but I didn’t see anything that made her worry. She didn’t seem to see any immediate threats around.”

Lys bit her lip, unconvinced. It was time to show her trump card — which also happened to be the one and only clue, all things considered.
“I didn’t get to tell you yet,” she apologized. “but there’s something very weird that happened. You see, Dawn sent me a DM. To put it in your own words, the message was pretty chill, true. But it ended abruptly, for no specific reason.”

If this were a true Ace Attorney trial, it was likely a piece of evidence would be judged as invalid. Fortunately for her, this wasn’t a trial. Any means valid in order to find the truth.

As she thought more about the circumstances... A germminated in her mind.

“In fact... Let’s not talk about the DM.” she dead, shutting down her phone’s screen and shoving it back in her pocket for emphasis. “Let’s talk about how your call ended. It had to end after all, right?”

“Well, yeah, it did when Dawn hung up on me.”

“How exactly did she hang up?” Steven asked. “I mean, was it the polite way or the “fuck the I’m out” way?”

“Uh... She said something like “I need to go” hanging up, but I’d say the second option?”

“Do you know why she hung up like that?” she asked.
carefully.

“Because she didn’t want to talk anymore? I like our conversation was going anywhere, and Hmm. Speaking of conversations that went nowhere was getting the uncomfortable feeling that the clues they were having right in this moment was much less than she would have preferred. She kept in mind that they did at least progress a bit in gathering details of what had happened, but... There still wasn’t concrete proof of anything, besides the fact that she was in a house where they had little phone reception... she wasn’t alone.

Well. Charlie had given her one more contract to work with, at least.

Lys shook her head. “Let’s be frank. If she didn’t want to talk to you at all and planned on hanging up, she would’ve done that as soon as possible. That she didn’t.” She raised a piercing glare at me scanning for any emotions that could appear in her face during the next couple of seconds. “You’ve been able to talk to her for quite a while actually, So what changed? What happened that’d make her hang up all of a sudden?”

“I told you, I don’t know. It just went out of the
she got all worried and said that she had to go. After that, she wasn’t listening to me and hung up. That’s all I know.”

The one detail he gave certainly felt absolutely relevant to this case and incredibly important to mention.

“Charlie.” Steven went in before Lys could continue.

“What do you mean by “all worried”? If you were the one making her worried, then...”

“I have no idea what caused it, sorry.” he apologized.

“But you saw how she reacted to it.” Lys countered.

“Just tell us that.”

Charlie blinked. “Oh.” He face-palmed. “Sorry, but I think it was the coffee running out. Well, uh, I remember even before that happened... She looked around like she wanted to show me around a lot even before that happened... She looked around like she couldn’t see much on the screen... and when we hung up, it looked like something was up— like she saw a ghost or something like that. Something showed up, most probably, and...”

A sudden shiver ran down his spine. At the time, he had been blinded by his frustration and exhaustion, and even listened to what she was trying to say; and an hour later... he hardly remembered as much as he should have.
But now... The images he had in his memory—were they distorted by his emotions? Were they overthinking? Or was Dawn really...?

Out of all the possible explanations for Dawn’s start Lys immediately took the one that seemed obvious to her, albeit the least preferable one.

“What if she were at gunpoint? What if the gun was with her made her hang up because she had something he didn’t want you to know? What if just couldn’t be so straightforward with the family because if she did, then he’d take action?”

Judging by Charlie’s ever paling face, not only had he considered that option before, but he clearly didn’t even consider it at all; yet all the possible irrational things could keep inside of him chose this moment to expose his subconscious and take over all his rationality. Many of his sister’s words now resonated in his mind, sounding this time with a new meaning; one that have been obvious, but that he had been blind to.

“All due to him listening to his anger and frustration of letting her talk and gathering the obvious hint of desperately sending him. How alone had this made her feel...?

“There’s got to be something that Dawn sa
made the discussion turn around.” Lys continued, grave as ever and determined to go to the bottom of everything. “There’s something she said a moment— that’s the evidence we need to figure out what happened. Charlie, we need to know!”

“I— I wasn’t paying attention at the time. What could he say? It seemed that the men were slipping away, only leaving the guilt and fear. I just assumed she ran away, and...” How stupid had he been? He had failed his sister when she needed him the most. “She’s in danger. Oh God. She’s in danger and I didn’t even take her seriously...”

Dawn’s best friend, who he had also let down, kept asking more questions. She deserved to know, but he couldn’t disclose anything.

“Lys.” Steven called out. “There’s more urgency now. Figuring that out, right now. If Dawn’s really in trouble, we need to do something now.” The words that he maintained really lasted only one split second—just letting him inhale sharply: “Remember what I said about Isabel’s offer?”

The teenager’s shoulders slumped indignantly; but her look of verbal answer proved that she could not deny that he was right, and that she secretly agreed; or wanted more than her resentment against a certain person...
“Look. You go and tell Dawn’s parents what you found, and I’ll go tell Isabel. No matter what the police does, Isabel can only bring you even more clues and advice on what to do, so you need to tell her up. We have to tell her about this. Okay?”

There was a silence. After a second, Lys stood up.

“Fine.” She sighed; but as soon as her eyes opened again, a resolved fire burned in her glare. “Forty-five minutes. And then we go to town and look at the evidence with the police.”
Chapter # 012

* The Prompter Echoes
* OST: Reminiscence
~ Ante Matter 2016
Steven D. Kaplan, nineteen years old, also known online as WinDows Gulim, administrator of the
Temmie Village Forum and its multiple satellite servers on various systems, was concerned. Concerned as in, lying awake and restless in his bed since the very moment he tried to lay down a few hours earlier. He simply could not let go. He could not forget the events he and his friends had witnessed; it had been too sudden, too nonsensical… too heartbreaking.

In all honesty, he was not a close friend of Dawn’s per se; she was among the most recent members on his forum, and although she was Lys’s best friend, they simply did not have that much in common besides that and Undertale.

Still… She was Lys’s best friend, as well as, from what he knew at least, her only true friend outside from the screen. As much as he had tried to keep Lys company ever since… It simply was not the same; she could not just forget about her, and he could obviously not replace a lifelong BFF.

That, and… When said lifelong friend seemingly betrayed everyone by running away on her own, or when there was the guilt of feeling like Lys was the one betraying her in the first place… He could only imagine how much it hurt. He could not fix something like that. That was too much.

Heck. He could not even meet with Lys face to face, what with her living literally on the other side of the world. He loved Australia and he had dozens of friends of his own around him, but when it came to how much he could interact with Lys… The isolation and technical difficulties resulting from the distance and time difference was unbearable. And yet, despite that, he still could not let go. Powerless as he may be, he knew that Lys needed him.

His phone vibrated. In a split second, it was in his hand, displaying the new message he had received:
Called it. He knew she would want to talk.

Finally a reason to do something productive and put his insomnia to good use.

@You: Yeah. How are you doing?

@Lys: Huge break in the case.
@Lys: Is it ok to call you?

… Wait, what? Seriously?

In the span of a dozen of seconds, Steven had rushed to plug his headset in and started a vocal call. Lys answered immediately.

“Great, you’re here. So, are you ready for an info dump right now?” Well, she certainly did not waste any second and dove into the sauerkraut right away. What a girl.
“I guess, yeah. It’s three a.m., but now that you’ve said that I can’t just hang up now. What happened?”

There was a quick snort, but it was soon repressed by what he could only imagine was his teen friend attempting to maintain an Absolutely Serious face, full Film Noir mode.

He could hear street noises and strong, resolute footsteps. Apparently she had not even waited to settle down and had sent him her messages right after leaving high school.

“So. You remember how it went yesterday after she vanished, however that happened. Her mom made flyers and all that while Charlie and I gave our testimonies. Nobody saw anything though, so I was the only one who could really give them any leads for a chronological reconstitution of what we know.”

“I still can’t believe nobody noticed anything. Is she really that sneaky?”

“Well, Charlie said he heard something weird and went to knock on her door to ask if she was okay, so I guess not; but as soon as he entered, she was already gone.” A quick pause. “She wasn’t sneaky, but she sure was fast. The ‘premeditated’ kind of fast. And that’s where nothing makes sense.”

“Because it sure as hell wasn’t premeditated. Right?”

From her tone alone, he could easily deduce where her reasoning was going. That, and, although he did not know Dawn all that well, he surely knew Lys and how she regarded her best friend.

Dawn and he had drifted apart soon after meeting online, because apart from the topics of Lys and Undertale, they hardly had any common interests. Besides, he had quickly stopped talking to her about Lys since every time he attempted to bring up the subject, she would start making these stupid clichéd jokes and laugh at those clichés and “aww” (ironically) and call them her OTP (unironically).

He did not need that kind of annoyance to plague his life, especially not when his real-life college buddies from IT class were already doing their part and would not ever let him hear the end of it anyway.

Still. Dawn could be annoying. Dawn could be (kind of) smart and self-conscious about lots of instinctual human behaviors. She could be crafty and a bit of a prankster at times, when she was in the right mood (that bit was certainly Yoshua’s bad influence).
But: she was not a liar. She was not manipulating, and she sure as hell cared about her friends. No matter how angry and sullen she could get when people turned against her, she would never pull something like this on any of them, let alone Lys. If a plan were behind her disappearance, such plan would have needed to be so elaborate and inconsiderate… There was no way in hell she could have thought it through, let alone pulled it off. She would definitely have sought some sort of “revenge” for Lys’s “betrayal” by “blackmailing” her, but her revenge would have been on the exact same level as what led to it.

She would have sought revenge through harmless pranks and possible other surprises she could have kept for them. Not through disappearing for no reason and making every single person she knew worried sick for her well-being.

Whatever had happened, it was certain that Dawn wasn’t in a normal state of mind at that moment. Or… that they were missing something deeper, that could better explain the contrast between her pre-disappearance behavior, and the strange and seemingly impossible actions that would have led to the resulting events.

“Exactly.” Lys answered, always in her Serious Mode. “She said that we’d see her “in a few minutes”, and then she was gone. Was she lying? Had she already prepared her escape that way? It’s not something she’d set up— and even if it were, that still doesn’t answer the most basic question: I mean, how did she even do it?! Even the police has no idea which way she went to just leave her room. Her flat’s on the bloody fifth floor for fuck’s sake!” Another dramatic pause supposed to hide the fact that she needed to breathe, and then: “But that’s not even the best part.”

“I’m listening?”

“I’m saying that we don’t know how she did it ‘cause as far as the hints we’ve found show, it was literally impossible for her to leave without being noticed. Her mom was in the living room so there’s no way she could’ve left through the front door, and once that exit’s out of the way, all other options for leaving the flat are of the same level of her just jumping out of her window and magically making it out alive, which has no way in hell of happening. You see what I mean by that?”

“She must’ve found some other way…?”

“We’re stuck with a fucking locked room mystery is what’s happening.” Lys gritted between her teeth. “There’s the theory that since it could’ve been “premeditated”,” (he could literally hear the air quotes and eye-roll just in her voice, wow) “maybe she left the room much sooner than we thought, and that then she sent those last messages from her phone, once she was already far away. But in that case, that doesn’t explain why Charlie would’ve heard anything, if by that time she was already gone. So, that idea’s out of the way.”
“Hmm. I’m guessing that if the police didn’t find anything that could’ve helped her escape through her room, it means they didn’t find anything that could’ve made that noise after she left, either?”

“Her laptop was the only thing that could’ve made any sound because we couldn’t find her phone, and it was muted. So, nope, nothing.”

“How about her run…? I thought you said she had launched Undertale on it.”

“It was, but she didn’t do anything on it. Frisk was still on the bed of flowers and didn’t move from there.” she quickly explained. “I checked her menu just in case— turned out she’d started the game on Hard Mode.” There was a weak snort… “Turns out she really had a surprise for us after all.”

Steven frowned. “If she did start to play and even planned to prank us with it, why did she leave?”

“Well. That’s where the breakthrough comes in.”

The footsteps paused for about a dozen of seconds, probably as she was waiting for a traffic light to turn green. When they started again, they were resolute as always.

“Nobody was around at the time, so nobody saw her leave. We concluded from that that since she was alone and locked in her room, then she was the only one who could’ve done something to leave, right? We were the only witnesses, if we can even call ourselves that — we interacted with her the minute before she disappeared, but we couldn’t see what happened. She left somehow, without leaving a trace, and without the intention of leaving any trace, because what kind of person running away would want to be found, right?” The grin that appeared on her face was practically audible. “Or so we thought.”

Wow. Was she saying that they had found proof that somebody else had been in her room at some point?!

“Wait, so the police found fingerprints or that stuff?”

“Ha, no, not a chance. There’s still no concrete proof that anyone else was there at the time.” In an instant, her voice had jumped from confident and satisfied to have found a lead, to suddenly dejected and bitter. “But. Something happened. You’ll never guess.”
As much as he enjoyed hearing her so determined and active after almost twenty-four hours of panic and near-depression, her game started to feel like she was stalling for a little too long. Steven’s heavy eyelids chose that moment to painfully remind him how tired he was. “It’s three-fucking-thirty a.m. over here. Just tell me already.”

“Charlie got a fucking video call from you-know-who.”

. . .


No but in all seriousness, she had lost him. What? How? When? Why???

“… The fuck?” was the only question his crunched up face managed to voice.

“I know, right!?” The only reason Lys had not openly shouted was, he guessed, because she was out in the streets and that although he was certain that by now she might have gotten a few stares from random bystanders, she still wanted at least to avoid making some sort of scene or just be viewed as a complete weirdo. She quickly added: “And better yet, get this: she sent me a PM. Here, wait a sec— I’ll show you.”

Without hanging up, he quit the window for the call and waited for any kind of notification to show up on his phone. Just about a minute later, here went a screenshot:

@Pineapplup: Hey! Finally able to tell you what really happened yesterday when I disappeared or whatever. You wouldn't believe me if I told you but this is HUGE. I’m really sorry if I couldn't read your messages earlieriiooop

Hardly five seconds later, Lys spoke again.

“Are you done reading?”

“Yeah, just a sec— yeah. She… didn’t finish it?” Welp, wasn’t that ominous as all hell.
“Nope. Looks like a finger got stuck on a few keys at the end for some reason, like if she took a grip on her phone and had to hide it from view quickly, for example. And after that, she sent that draft without correcting or finishing it.”

“… Like if she was in a hurry.,” he found himself thinking out loud. And when he said “hurry”, it was “hurry” as in, of course, way more than just in a hurry.

“And better yet? I tried to send her a few messages a bit everywhere — texts, Discord, WhatsApp… Well. My WhatsApp messages are marked as “sent”, and not “delivered.” Which means that it’s not only that she didn’t read them — it’s that her phone couldn’t receive them. Either it’s turned off or she moved to a place without any reception or something.”

None of these options were good signs, especially with the implications of their previous deduction as to why Dawn would send an unfinished message. Still, the part that kept bothering him was that the casual tone in her PM seemed to imply that she had (or at least she thought she had) all the time in the world to write as long a letter as she wanted; and yet, very quickly, her message was cut short.

What kind of situation would make her think she was safe for long enough to write a long and detailed explanation, only to prove her wrong before she had any time to write anything of actual significance? That did not make sense…

“Either way. Dawn calls Charlie, she sends me a message that she doesn’t get to finish, and after that she can’t receive anything from us? Sounds a lot like she was trying to tell us something huge, like she said, but that something else stopped her.”

Besides himself, Steven gulped. Images of the worst horror movie scenarii flashed in his mind.

“So… What do we do?” he quickly asked, in a voice much less manly than he would have preferred.

“You still didn’t guess where I’m going?”

… Knowing her, that was not reassuring to the slightest.

“… Aren’t they busy with loads of police guys already investigating the place or something?” he tried. “I’m sure Charlie already told them everything about his call. You can go to the police and tell them about Dawn’s text, but you should leave her family alone.”
“But he’s seen her!” she pleaded. “Maybe if I’m fast enough I’ll see him before they interrogate him.”

Lys. What the fuck are you doing. No. Bad. Bad girl. “Uh… Didn’t the police tell you something about letting them do their job in peace or something because they’re the professionals and you’re not?”

“Oh, yeah. I’m not a relative and the police already checked my flat and my stuff just in case I could’ve helped her escape or something. They consider that I’m no longer relevant to the case and that I shouldn’t interfere.”

If anything, the footsteps he could hear sounded like they were speeding up. Steven sighed, carefully removed his glasses, and face-palmed, letting his hand slowly glide all the way down his face.

“You’re gonna ignore them and investigate anyway, aren’t you.”

“Totally.”

That single word was imbued with unquestionable pride and the confidence that she was undoubtedly doing the right thing, despite the obvious existence of the laws that existed for no other reason than to protect her from her own recklessness. It was such a shame that whenever she disagreed with the authority she had to act like she had her own personal laws to follow instead…

That girl was so incredibly crazy. Why did she have to make his heart pound in so many anxious ways. Next time she’ll give him a heart attack because she’ll build her own rocket and fly herself to space like if it’s no big deal or something.

“Dude. Don’t get in trouble, ‘kay?”

“The police left her room ages ago, they’re not gonna mind! They think she ran away, they won’t worry about what she left behind in her room after they’ve already done it yesterday. They didn’t find anything wrong, so they’ve got no reason to think that they’ll ever find anything wrong with it. It’s just a teen’s room after all.”

He strongly disagreed on a lot of levels, but he knew that no matter what anyone could tell her, not a single person in the universe would be able to change her mind.
“And hey, let’s be real. It’s a “teenager ran away from home” case, not a murder case. They’re gonna focus a lot more on the outside than the inside.”

He honestly knew too little about US police procedures to care about retorting anything to that.

“Besides. Since when was Phoenix Wright legally allowed to investigate his crime scenes?”

Oh boy. No. “… Lys, this is real life. Not Ace Attorney.”

“I’ve played these games since I was six years old. Ace Attorney is my life. Objection overruled.”
He could practically hear her smirk when she was saying that, and that only made him face-palm once more. Then she added: “Also, I’m gonna need a sidekick.”

“Oi. I’m older. Why do I have to be the sidekick?”

“’Cause it’s hard for a detective to do any real work when he’s stuck thousands of miles away from the crime scene?”

“… Touché.” He didn’t know whether it was the ungodly hour and his sleeplessness or if he just wanted to goof off with her, but only then did he realize that he was playing along. As soon as he found his reason to do so, however, he did not mind nearly as much. “Besides, you’re right. I should be your sidekick. Sidekicks are the ones who keep the detective grounded and stop them from getting in trouble.” He paused for a single second, just so he could smile sassily: “… Whether with exterior forces or because they get their head stuck up their ass and forget how reality works.”

She snorted. “Dumbass.”

He smiled. “I’m trying.”

They kept chatting for another dozen of minutes, until Lys announced that she was about to arrive at Dawn’s flat and needed to hang up, if only temporarily.

Steven sighed heavily.
“Look, I know it’s already too late, but are you sure you should bother them now? I’m sure they’re busy with lots of other stuff.”

“Steven. I’m bringing info they’re gonna want to hear. And I want to clear things up.” she retorted. “Besides, I’d like to check on them, too. I’m worried about her mother, especially.”

This had him pause for a few painful seconds. He really didn’t like the sound of that last sentence.

He dared to ask. “… What about her mother?”

“Well, how can I say this…” She clearly wasn’t at ease. “Just picture Toriel, I guess. Kinda.”

He raised a pair of skeptical eyebrows. “What do you mean by that? You mean the mother hen side or the ‘will shoot fireballs at you if you try to leave’ side?”

“The side where… Well, let’s say she’s had some… sad moments in her life. If Dawn doesn’t give us news quickly, I think there’s good reason to worry about her too. That’s why Charlie didn’t go back upstate yesterday. To keep an eye on her and make sure she’s not alone. Not that their dad approves, but I guess they thought it was better for Charlie to miss a few days of college than him slacking off from his job.”

… Oh boy. That side. Yikes.

“Do you… know what happened?”

“You never wondered about the age gap between her children? Dawn’s pretty young compared to Charlie, don’t you think?” she asked somewhat rhetorically. “Well, eight years isn’t that much, but…”

… That didn’t sound good at all. “What happened?”

“Dawn should’ve had an older sibling.”

He froze. Then shuddered. There was no need for details.
“Yeowch.” Very eloquent and tactful. Wow.

“Yeah. What you said.” Apparently she didn’t seem to have any better words to describe her thoughts on that situation herself. “Anyway. We all, just, really don’t want her to lose another child, right? And we don’t want her to… well, I’m not sure what she would or wouldn’t do, but let’s not take any risks. I hope bringing her some news on the case will at least give her some hope.”

That… certainly was a much better motivation for Lys to go check on them and tell them what she knew of the case. He still didn’t approve of her possibly going against the police’s recommendations because it could do nothing but slow everyone down, but… He could understand at least the frustration and pain that came from being left in the dark as to what was going on.

“One last thing.” Steven added firmly, but also with a speck of hesitation. “If things do get serious… You’re gonna get into this seriously too, right?”

“Well duh.”

Yeah, pretty much what he feared. “Remember what Isabel said, okay? At least she’s got a sister and parents in the force and they’ll know what to do.”

There was an angry huff. “I don’t need to involve her. It’ll only bring more trouble.” was her immediate response. To be fair, he kind of agreed that letting both girls in a single conversation unsupervised was the best and fastest way to reinstate the Cold War in a matter of seconds, and possibly induce the Third World War soon after.

Everybody on the TVF forum and servers knew never to leave both BlueDoppler and Calliope Quill in the same chatroom or forum topic for more than forty-two seconds. Those who weren’t enjoying the drama and brought their metaphorical popcorn and 3D-glasses knew to fear the teens’ wrath. In retrospect, it was still kind of hilarious how nobody knew how it started, and that whenever one or the other was asked about it, it was clear that even they could not remember at all when or why they started getting at each other’s throats and that asking them this question was hurting their pride because they were very well aware that they weren’t able to answer it properly, meaning that the only logical conclusion out of this was that their feud was absolutely meaningless and pettily stupid.

Speaking of Cold War, he started to wonder which side would be the equivalent of each country. The girls were both American, both buttheads in their own ways…
He remembered that Dawn had once found a trope name for their case. “Academic Alpha Bitch” was the universally agreed upon name for this type of character. The basic definition was something along the lines of “female control freak obsessed with having the best grades in class”, and at least so far, he had to admit that it was accurate for both girls: Lys was into science, Isabel into literature, languages and philosophy/psychology-related subjects. They were both top students in their own fields, and yet unable to compete with each other on a truly intellectual level.

In most, if not in all media he knew, there only ever was one character of that type at any given time in the entire series, or at least if a second one were to appear, it usually was a one-time only.

It was easy to realize why the universe was certainly meant to function so that there could only be one “αβ” in the same location at any given time, for the sake of staying intact or not disrupting its balance or something. Having to deal with two of them on a daily basis, with both of them unable to compete in any regular field… It meant that whenever they disagreed on one thing (and they would disagree a lot), they needed to find something to compete on, no matter how childish or blatantly irrelevant to the actual topic it was. Chaos and madness inevitably ensued.

Still. Nobody with an iota of common sense would dare call them “rivals” unless they had a death wish.

He sighed, having anticipated Lys’s pretty reasonable reaction (for once). But still, since she was going to get in trouble either way… He had to make his point. “I’m pretty sure you do. It’s better to involve her than to go in blind and get in trouble because you’re interfering with the force. She definitely knows stuff that neither you nor I know about how to handle this.”

There was a long, cold pause. Swiftly, Lys muttered one last “I’ll see you later”, then hung up. Welp. He had planted the seeds, now all he had to do was hope that she’d make the right choices… rationally.

His options were now to either wait until she decided to call again, or listen to his exhaustion and go back to sleep… or go to sleep, period. He still didn’t feel like he would be able to actually close his eyes and drift away until morning came, though, so the “choice” was quickly taken.

After all, he never was a quitter. Even when it may be the best choice for the sake of his good health… He could never bring himself to let down someone in need.

Unless he was proven explicitly that doing so would lead to the best outcome in the long run, he could never give up.

Was it pushing it too far? Maybe. But she had to carefully look at the current situation from the right perspective: she wanted to be efficient, she needed to be confident, and everybody had to find the truth one way or another.
What was the one thing that taught her how to analyze mysteries and solve cases? The *Ace Attorney* games were far from perfect, especially regarding the dubious legality in its protagonists’ actions; but there was one thing that nobody could deny: these games ruled. And their way of teaching kids how to use their brains instead of blindly jumping to conclusions was at the very least honorable.

Well, maybe not kids. She was probably the only kid who got to play this game as a kid. But she was thankful for that. Critical thinking was the best thing for an individual to develop, as early as possible.

So what if these games weren’t suited for her young age? She survived and came out stronger.

(Maybe Dawn didn’t, though.)

So what if the concept was ridiculous if anybody were stupid enough to want to apply it to real life. Who cared? Her best friend since third grade was the victim of a case, and she was going to solve it no matter what, the only way she knew how.

She wouldn’t have to actually shout the words or pretend that the game mechanics would apply in real life and look like a complete lunatic. All she had to do was pretend, inside her mind, that this was how things could be ordered; it was a nice and engaging way of classifying the facts.

This would calm her and bring her to a situation she could relate to, so she would be equipped to solve this case with a cool head and a clear, acute mind.

The logic was what mattered.

Lys took one last, deep breath… then knocked. Surprisingly, the answer came fast; even more surprisingly, the one who answered was actually the mother herself.

“Oh… Good afternoon, Amaryllis.” She had a weak, but genuinely comforted smile. Apparently, coming for a visit could at least do that much on its own.

Normally she would have rolled her eyes and jokingly told her that she didn’t have to call her by her full name every time, that everybody had stopped doing so ages ago, except her dad because that was her dad and he was the one who had decided to choose such a convoluted name in the first place.
But… this time, she let it slide. It wasn’t like it mattered.

“I’m not coming at a wrong time, am I?” she asked politely. She had planned to pay them a visit no matter the circumstances, but you never knew.

“No, no. Of course not. Don’t worry, you’re always welcome here. You know that by now, don’t you?”

The tone wasn’t there, but the warmth in her words still betrayed the fact that she had actually tried to lighten the mood with a small joke of sorts. It wasn’t really too funny, but that was a start. At least her case wasn’t as desperate as she had feared.

“Just making sure.” she shrugged absent-mindedly before entering and closing the door behind her path.

The mother wordlessly guided her towards the living room, even though the teenager knew the place like the back of her hand. She offered her a glass of orange juice, not having asked her preference because she had known it for nearly a decade. Then…

“Amaryllis, dear…” She took a long, breathless sigh. “I can’t understand. Everybody says this is the moment in children’s lives when they want to be independent, or rebel, but…”

_It wouldn’t be Dawn’s style. She would never be so straightforward_, Lys thought for herself.

“You’re her best friend. You two are inseparable. You’re a teenager, too, now. So is there anything… Do you think you can understand what— why she would do something like this…?”

They still believed that Dawn had run away on her own volition. She should have expected, and yet, it still hurt that they would jump to conclusions like this.

The fair solution should be to tell her what she had found; that she was wrong; that Dawn had not abandoned them. But despite her entire body shaking with the urge to say it, she found herself wondering if this really was the best thing to do, at least for now.

After all, she really didn’t have that much proof, in the end. She had really just one clue: the fact that Dawn had tried to contact them at all, and how nonsensical it should be. It was enough proof to convince somebody who knew Dawn well enough, and it was definitely enough to convince someone in her family. But it probably wasn’t enough to convince the police just yet; it was enough to shade some doubt, but what would they do after that?
Even if she could prove that Dawn had been kidnapped with that little piece of evidence she had at this moment, there was no way of identifying who the kidnapper was from any of the clues they had gathered so far. There was no way of locating Dawn, especially now that her phone was out of reach.

The question that came after was…

What good could it do to a mother to tell her that her child had not run away, and that it was a kidnapping instead? Just looking at her face, she was broken enough as it was.

Heck. For all she knew, that single piece of evidence could be taken a completely different way— they could believe that Dawn had run away on her own, and then been abducted while she was already far away. That, at least, would perfectly explain why not a single trace of any outsider could be found in her room.

In the end, Lys found herself mumbling the first thing that came to her mind in order to answer the adult’s question: “I don’t know. But we’re gonna find out.”

Steven jolted back to consciousness when his cell phone started ringing and buzzing on top of his sleepy chest. Apparently he had actually dozed off… Surely Lys had taken her time to have some regular banter with the family, instead of jumping right into business. That was reassuring.

As usual, it was a WhatsApp call. Only when he answered did he realize that contrary to the last, time this one was a video call.

Glob damn it, Lys. You’re lucky I got dressed.

Second surprise, what he could see on the screen was a setup of Lys and Charlie sitting face to face, while also facing the phone’s camera. From what he could guess, the phone had been placed horizontally on a table or a shelf, in such way that it was forming a perfectly equilateral triangle along with Lys and Charlie’s positions.

Much less surprisingly, Lys was confidently sitting on her chair, her legs crossed, her spine straight, and with a pen and notebook in hand and ready to use. She didn’t seem to pay any attention to the camera, instead fully focused on the tall guy that was going to be her future “witness” to question; for that, he was thankful. She probably had loaded the video only so he could see the scene, more than the opposite. He quickly deactivated the video from his side, gaining full view of the scene that was occurring at the same time, but just about nine thousands of
miles away from him. Neither of the two Americans seemed to mind, and he thought Charlie might have given the camera a small glance and given a small wordless nod that was supposed to mean either “Smart move.”, or “Thank God I won’t be distracted by this 4AM face all the way through, seriously dude just go find a hobby or go to sleep this gal is going to be the death of you one of these days, also your shirt is stupid.” All things considered, it probably was both.

On the other side of the planet, yet at the same time very close thanks to the wonders of technology, Lys clicked her tongue in order to bring all the attention back to her.

“So. We all have context, and we all know what we’re doing here. Any questions before we begin?”

“Just one thing.” Charlie went up immediately. “I advised Mom to go take a nice nap so she wouldn’t get involved. So don’t do any crazy stuff, because she needs her sleep. Got it?”

“Understood.” the teen girl nodded firmly.

“Trust me, you don’t want to see my roommate at four a.m. I’m all for not waking him up either.”

“Good. Good.” There was a pause. Then a longer pause. Charlie pursed his lips awkwardly and turned towards Lys. “So, uh, what are you waiting for again?”

“Dawn called you, right?” the girl answered with a serious shrug. Yes, a serious shrug. Don’t ask how she pulled that off. “We just, want to know what she said and how it went, in as many details as possible. We’ll let you talk, we won’t interrupt, and then we’ll just share our thoughts when you’re done. Is that good?”

“Um. Okay, sure.” Charlie sent a questioning look at the phone’s camera, but he obtained from Steven no other answer than a silent non-committal sigh with a somehow audible eye-roll.

Lys smirked in anticipation, readying her pen and bringing her notebook closer.

**Witness Testimony**
So actually, I’m the one who called her. I was stalking her Discord because I had literally nothing better to do besides looking after my Mom.

And then at some point there’s this small thing— you know, the green dot. It goes up and proves that she’s online for the first time since she vanished.

She rejected the first call. But the second time I tried, she answered immediately. She must’ve already had her phone in her hands…

I have no idea why she’d reject the first call on purpose and then pick up the second time, though.

Maybe I took her off-guard. She looked like she hadn’t meant to answer the second one either.

------------------------------------------

Charlie seemed to reach a pause, so Lys signed him to stop.

Judging by the black and messy state of her notebook’s current page, she had gathered enough data already to at least discuss what they had heard so far, and she probably planned on hearing the rest later.

For the time being, it was time to dig and read between the lines in order to see if there couldn’t be something more Charlie had inadvertently left out.

Like the games often repeated, witnesses did not always lie consciously. Charlie wouldn’t lie when his sister was at stake. But memory was a funny thing, and assumptions were easy to make; that, and it was just as easy to forget to mention the tiny details when you genuinely think they’re irrelevant… while they might be game changers.

That being said. It was time to get to the interesting part.

Cross Examination

“Okay so, first off.” Lys started. “What time was it?”
“Around ten, I think?” Charlie pulled out his phone and clicked a few virtual buttons, then corrected: “Hm. The call started at ten thirty-four. Guess I lost track of time. Spending all day at home will do that.”

The teen scribbled down all the additional information. She did not feel like she was truly able to deduce any specific meaning behind it, but she felt like there just might be something to it… Just maybe.

“There’s something I don’t understand.” Steven said soon after, audibly confused. “Dawn didn’t want to contact you?”

“She sure didn’t look at ease. She kept giving these worried looks, you know, the one she sends when she’s looking for someone’s approval or something.” Charlie’s expression suddenly became a bit smug. “That’s how I found out she wasn’t alone.”

There was a light, repeated noise when Lys’s pen fell off her hand and on the ground, then bounced on the parquet.

“You SAW him?!”

“Quiet—!” the elder hissed in a forced whisper. “People sleeping, remember?”

“S-sorry, but I— you— W-what did he look like?! Was it a man or a woman? Did you get to see a face?”

“Lys, he just said he knew she wasn’t alone.” Steven interrupted her. “It doesn’t mean that he got to—”

“Actually, he did show up on video at some point.” Charlie countered. “He even talked a bit— it was a man. He was wearing a costume and the video quality was terrible, though. I can’t really say I got to see his face for real.”

What came next in Lys’s mental recreation of an Ace Attorney court trial was obvious and natural. She did not say the words out loud, but they nonetheless resonated in her mind by instinct.
“What kind of costume?” This was the first question, but she had many others to ask afterwards. This one simply was the first one to cross her mind.

“It was a Sans cosplay. Yes, the Sans from Undertale. Pretty realistic one, too… Or at least it looked good when the video quality was so low.”

Dawn being kidnapped by a guy in a Sans costume, right after she was trying to play Undertale…? Huh. Lys wrote that down as a coincidence, but it didn’t leave her mind. Maybe they would find more clues and prove that there actually was a true connection between the two.

“He talked to you?” Lys asked, not explicitly wording the question that came after but trusting Charlie to know what kind of answer she was really looking for.

“He went in when…”

Charlie seemed about to continue his sentence, but he paused and entered a somewhat tranced state, deep in thought. Apparently he had forgotten, or maybe not…

Understanding that he needed a quiet environment, both Lys and Steven made a wordless agreement not to say a word or even move until he could start talking again. Thankfully, after about a minute of silence, the young man’s efforts were successful.

“I think it was when I told Dawn that she couldn’t be kidnapped, because she wouldn’t be the one calling me if she were. That’s— that’s when he came in.”

A shiver ran down Lys’s spine.

“What did he say?”
“I think he took the phone from her, and then he said something like “that’s enough”, and then…” There was another silence. Charlie went back to staring at the void, deep in thought… and then a face-palm came crashing against his disappointed forehead. “… I interrupted him. He didn’t speak much after that. I think he said that we wouldn’t find them no matter how hard we tried, and he talked about California? And a mountain…? That’d explain the crappy reception.”

Lys’s pen danced again on her notebook, writing down as many details as she could even when she could not figure out their immediate relevance.

“About that reception problem.” Steven stated. “How bad was it?”

“Really bad. The kind of bad where you’d expect the call to start lagging and lose connection entirely any second. It didn’t, but it really had trouble keeping up, especially when Dawn went up the stairs.”

“She could walk around freely?” Lys asked, surprised.

“Yeah. It looked like they were in a basement when the call started, but at some point Dawn went up some stairs and ended up in a living room, I think.” Charlie paused again, once more trying to ensure that he was remembering things right. “She did tell me something about how she didn’t want to go outside, though. How she’d be dead if she went out.”

“So she was restrained.”

“She was pretty chill for someone who wanted me to believe she was kidnapped.” the elder deadpanned. “She said lots of crazy stuff, but I didn’t see anything that made her worry. She didn’t seem to have any immediate threats around.”

Lys bit her lip, unconvinced.
It was time to show her trump card— which also was her one and only clue, all things considered.

“I didn’t get to tell you yet,” she apologized quickly, “but there’s something very weird that happened. You see, Dawn sent me a DM. To put it in your own words, the message was pretty chill, true. But then it ended abruptly, for no specific reason.”

If this were a true Ace Attorney trial, it was likely that this piece of evidence would be judged as invalid. However, fortunately for her, this wasn’t a trial. Any means were valid in order to find the truth.

As she thought more about the circumstances… A new idea germinated in her mind.

“In fact… Let’s not talk about the DM.” she decided, shutting down her phone’s screen and shoving it back in her pocket for emphasis. “Let’s talk about how your call ended. It had to end after all, right?”

“Well, yeah, it did when Dawn hung up on me.”

“How exactly did she hang up?” Steven asked. “I mean, was it the polite way or the “fuck this shit I’m out” way?”

“Uh… She said something like “I need to go” before hanging up, but I’d say the second option?”

“Do you know why she hung up like that?” she asked carefully.

“Because she didn’t want to talk anymore? It’s not like our conversation was going anywhere, anyway.”
Hmm. Speaking of conversations that went nowhere, she was getting the uncomfortable feeling that the one they were having right in this moment was much less filled with clues than she would have preferred. She kept in mind the fact that they did at least progress a bit in gathering the details of what had happened, but… There still wasn’t any concrete proof of anything, besides the fact that Dawn was in a house where they had little phone reception, and that she wasn’t alone.

Well. Charlie had given her one more contradiction to work with, at least.

Lys shook her head. “Let’s be frank. If she didn’t want to talk to you at all and planned on hanging up, she would’ve done that as soon as possible. Except that she didn’t.” She raised a piercing glare at him, scanning for any emotions that could appear on his face during the next couple of seconds. “You’ve been able to talk to her for quite a while actually, right? So what changed? What happened that’d make her hang up all of a sudden?”

“I told you, I don’t know. It just went out of the blue, she got all worried and said that she had to go and after that, she wasn’t listening to me and hung up. That’s all I know.”

The one detail he gave certainly felt absolutely relevant to this case and incredibly important to mention.

“Charlie.” Steven went in before Lys could react. “What do you mean by “all worried”? If you weren’t the one making her worried, then…”

“I have no idea what caused it, sorry.” he apologized.

“But you saw how she reacted to it.” Lys countered. “Just tell us that.”

Charlie blinked. “Oh.” He face-palmed. “Sorry. Must be the coffee running out. Well, uh, I remember that even before that happened… She looked around a lot, she wanted to show me around a lot even if I couldn’t see much on the screen… and when she hung up, it looked like something was up— like she’d seen a ghost or something like that. Something showed up, most probably, and…”

A sudden shiver ran down his spine. At the time, he had been blinded by his frustration and exhaustion, and hardly even listened to what she was trying to say; and as a result, he hardly remembered as much as he should have.

But now… The images he had in his memory— were they distorted by his emotions? Were they overthinking it?
Or was Dawn really…?

Out of all the possible explanations for Dawn’s behavior, Lys immediately took the one that seemed the most obvious to her, albeit the least preferable one.

“What if she were at gunpoint? What if the guy who was with her made her hang up because she said something he didn’t want you to know? What if she just couldn’t be so straightforward with the truth because if she did, then he’d take action?”

Judging by Charlie’s ever paling face, not only had he not considered that option before, but he clearly did not want to consider it at all; yet all the possible irrational fears he could keep inside of him chose this moment to escape his subconscious and take over all his rationality.

Many of his sister’s words now resonated in his memory, sounding this time with a new meaning; one that should have been obvious, but that he had been blind to.

All due to him listening to his anger and frustration instead of letting her talk and gathering the obvious hints she was desperately sending him.

How alone had this made her feel…?

“There’s got to be something that Dawn said that made the discussion turn around.” Lys continued, grave as ever and determined to go to the bottom of everything. “There’s something she said at that moment— that’s the evidence we need to prove what happened. Charlie, we need to know!”

“I— I w-wasn’t paying attention at the time! I…” What could he say? It seemed that the memories were slipping away, only leaving the guilt and anger. “I just assumed she ran away, and…” How stupid had he been? He had failed his sister when she needed him the most. “She’s in danger. Oh God. She’s in danger and I didn’t even take her seriously…”

Dawn’s best friend, who he had also let down, kept asking more questions. She deserved to know, but he couldn’t…

“Lys.” Steven called out. “There’s more urgent than figuring that out, right now. If Dawn’s really in trouble, we need to do something now.” The pause he maintained really lasted only one split second, just letting him inhale sharply: “Remember what we said about Isabel’s offer?”

The teenager’s shoulders slumped indignantly; but the lack of verbal answer proved that she could not deny that he was right, and that she secretly agreed; or wanted to agree more than her resentment against a certain person let her.
“Look. You go and tell Dawn’s parents what you found, and I’ll go tell Isabel. No matter what the police does, Isabel can only bring you even more clues and advice on what to do, so you need to meet up. We have to tell her about this. Okay?”

There was a silence. After a second, Lys stood up.

“Fine.” She sighed; but as soon as her eyes opened again, a resolved fire burned in her glare. “For Dawn.”
Chapter # 012

* The Prompter Echoes
* OST: Reminiscence
  ~ Ante Matter 2016
Chapter # 012

* The Prompter Echoes
* OST: Reminiscence
~ Ante Matter 2016

Read via Screenshots Here (full formatting but may encounter loading issues)

Chapter End Notes
This chapter took forever for a number of reasons. One of them is a problem that I was in the end incapable of addressing at all besides blink-and-you'll-miss-it references: the fact that Steven is a fan of Homestuck, as much as Lys is a fan of Ace Attorney. He's much less obsessed with it than Lys is obsessed with the AA games, but I figured that it's still an important part of his character, so... welp. I guess the reason why it wasn't portrayed as much is because it just doesn't have any reason to show up given how the story goes, but still, since it was in the preview images and this chapter was supposed to sort of focus on Steven's character... I sort of wish I could've hidden at least one or two more references. It doesn't help that I'm not that much of a fan of Homestuck myself, though. It's hard to make references to that you don't know much about yourself.

About Ace Attorney, on the other hand, I guess I owe everyone who doesn't know these games at all an apology, because wow things went completely overboard. In my defense, just as much as including Homestuck wasn't very relevant to this chapter's story, Ace Attorney was on the contrary probably a little bit too relevant to the direction this chapter was taking.

Ace Attorney was never the One Fandom I was Into, at any point in my life (Professor Layton was, during my teen years); however... It really is just that great! I've been rewatching a few no-commentary playthroughs on YouTube, and man did I have a good time reminiscing all the stuff I had forgotten about the stories and cases. So, I guess I grew nostalgic. Back in the old version of this fanfic, back in 2016, Learn When to Quit was supposed to be one crossover story out of a dozen others, all set in one gigantic multiverse a little bit like how they're doing now with the Marvel universe; and most notably, the world of Undertale was supposed to be set in the exact same universe as Ace Attorney, because back in that time, it allowed me to tie up quite a few loose ends regarding Frisk's backstory, for example. Maybe I'll give you more details about that another time, in the next Weekly Update or something. It depends on how much Ace Attorney lore you're interested in digesting for the sake of digging up old facts about this fanfic's embarrassing first version ¯\_(ツ)_/¯

Anyway, let me reassure you: the current 2019 version of this fanfic is 100% about Undertale, and the only importance Ace Attorney has in this story is just that Lys is obsessed with it, nothing more. I still kind of regret not being able to keep that crossover idea because there were a lot of plot/character opportunities I loved with it... But I feel that this story makes a lot more sense if it remains purely Undertale-related. Besides, the way this plot is conveyed is convoluted enough as it is xD
Learn When to Quit

— Act 2 —

That’s Your Fault

Scene 1.1

» Read the PDF version here! «

» Read on tumblr here! «
If you want a good old, eye-roll-inducing euphemism today was not Alphys’s best example of a “normal day.”

She had woken up. She had gone to her office, started a new day of work which she perfectly knew only would be another day of full procrastination, as Mettaton showed up so she’d have an excuse to do something she enjoyed doing — building machines.

On that note... part of her wanted to slow her down because, hey— what if once his new body was ready he decided to stop visiting her altogether? Who would she be able to confide in without bothering Undyne? Whether she would be able to build in order to feel like finally doing something at least somewhat useful.

Either way. Her plans for the day had not included intruding Sans, who apparently was now a time traveler all things, despite the scientific fact that money had been proven centuries ago to be biologically impossible to remember time jumps through any conventional means. She had not planned to have another intruder, a top of that, about to visit the laboratory’s base to test her soul’s determination level in the Extraction.
And she... had not been ready for that humanity familiar in all the wrong ways, and to look so destroyed to realize firsthand that she had recollection of the interactions they may have had time that no longer existed. Let alone had she been for the existential crisis material that followed.

The human had looked so earnestly desperately been willing to humor her and try to see if somehow, by some kind of déjà-vu miracle, “remember” a few things. Mind you, “remember” misuse of the word: it is strictly impossible to remember events that have been, by definition, erased from the apparent course of time. But still. She knew how déjà-vu was supposed to work. had been established long ago, in order to understand its mechanisms. The current theorist, the monsterkind had come up with had quite a few points about how déjà-vu could be triggered and explain order to, if not remember per se, at least recollect and tiny remnants of these erased times so one could acknowledge these events.

The main element of this model, which could explain mechanisms of déjà-vu but had admittedly only discovered very recently, had a very simple yet intuitive conclusion: true time travel... did not actu
A time jump never consisted in “going back” contrary to what its deceitful name implied. In fact, nothing but an optical illusion to the caster. Time jumps really were never anything other than using the power of your determination in order to jump a given time in the past, and use it as reference to manipulate the universe in a way that made it appear that the universe had gone back to a point which it very much looked like the past. Except that it was not really the past; it was nothing but a recreation.

Which meant that as powerful as this caster it was never perfect. Bits and pieces of the present remained, even if they should have become inactive. But then, from that point, if the right trigger could be found and exploited properly… More and more of the pieces can resurface, until almost all of them are back.

These pieces are the déjá-vu; finding one piece through a chain reaction, lead to others, trigger and more déjá-vu until you feel like you have almost all of these pieces, and possibly reconstituted everything.

But as wonderful as this method sounds, it is, nevertheless, never a perfect and complete process. You can retrieve the pieces: it does not necessarily mean that you will be able to put the jigsaw puzzle back in place on your own. Moreover, it also means that this reconstruction
Moreover, it also means that time is very susceptible to any kinds of exterior influences and suggestions. If time travelers were to find someone at the middle of this process and trying to “remember” an event, it would be easy for them to tweak those pieces of memories in their favor, depending on their intentions. Pieces of context can be very easily misunderstood, and if they reconstitutes a false version of an erased timeline, it would be unlikely for them to ever know what truly happened.

This is when, hopefully... Another factor had to be included in the equation. The second requirement for déjà-vu to occur in the first place was still a theory, and understandably difficult to effectively prove whether an element truly had any part in allowing a person to reminisce details that no longer existed, or not. Still, many believed its part in the existence of déjà-vu to be undeniable, simply because it made the most sense. Déjà-vu was an ability of the soul, after all. It was the key to unlock this ability to be of emotional nature.

This second requirement... was implied to be an emotional attachment to what was forgotten. It was theorized that the stronger impact an event left on a monster’s consciousness before time would jump back, the more likely they would have déjà-vu about it. Happy memories... Even wounds... Even monsters wished to treasure and never forget... Those were able to be the reasons some species started to manipulate...
supposed to be the easiest memories to trigger.

Now, all this... This was, to her at least, merely the tip of the iceberg. As far as she could *remember* truly, she had experienced déjà-vu before, and she had never anyone who had — because if she ever had, they have been later erased as well. 

In all honesty, she... was not sure what to think. She wanted to trust Sans, and Sans apparently trusted her — a human, who was injured, but who seemed to care more about *her* forgetting than about said injury... Well. She couldn’t exactly say “no” to a face like Sans’s. Besides, this could be a benefit too, for scientific purposes. It was time to check whether their theory was right or not. 

Had she been... emotionally attached to that human at a different time? What she subconsciously wanted to see while seeing her face was an incomprehensible thing — compassion, and calm — this was a human, and she somehow knew she had nothing to fear from this one. Contrary to what she intuitively knew she would be facing a... different one. Had there been more... one human at some point? No, maybe she was little too much into this. 

This human definitely wanted her to “remember” — be that she saw themselves as... friends? So... The small tug in her soul made her reason that
had been just the beginning of a true friendship bud of kindness that hadn’t had enough time to be full friendship just yet.

Still, all this put aside; the strangest impulse she that upon looking at this human, she... felt an in strong need to protect her. At this point, it was be mere stage of caring for an individual — it felt like. It felt like the safety of this human... was linked safety of all of monsterkind as well, as paradox nonsensical as this was supposed to be.

In order to start small, she had tried to offer blatantly obvious option as to what kind of activity they could have done together, in order to bond in some way. If they had spent any time at fun over something, surely it had to do with ne over a series of some kind, hadn’t it...?
Of all things that teen could have used as a first. Well, she had certainly gone straight to the point like it was the best way to put it.

Had they spent some time nerding out over a Certainly they had. It just... definitely wasn’t the fandom she had expected to see.

The human just *had* to show her these cartoon in her rectangle machine— wait, no. It was a phone how phones looked back where she was from. Th
how phones looked back where she was from. It was because this specific human did not come from the Shadow Surface. Not the one they knew. Yes, this train of thought seemed accurate... It was stupid, but it felt right.

And when she had seen those cartoony images... Talk about a thought storm.

How could someone have in their phone’s memory sounds, all related to her and, somehow, other, she knew vaguely or closely? With so many differences there could only be so many different artists behind so many people who somehow knew about them, having ever seen them before...

... except that they had. She could even tell how.

This was all just a game. Her own existence—could it really be? Yes, it was; they had discussed it. She could remember the words, but blurry images and sounds, and deep shared feelings had made their way in as they resurfaced from whichever shadowy part of an unconscious soul they had previously retreated to. Only that, but... Why did she feel like she missed everything? Like she hadn’t seen Undyne, or Mettaton, or Papyrus, for so long, and...

She didn’t want to accept these feelings. They were
Everything was so, so wrong. They had to be lying. Except that they had not even said a single word. Just left her with those images, as undeniable proof.

How could these images remain despite the time? Because they were out of the loop — they did not even in the loop. And that human did not either. The player of that game. A game that had countless them the Underground apart and taken lives, and...

She remembered that the human had tried to catch her arms at that time; she did not remember her balance, but she had definitely started to feel for that to become a likely event. She remembered the human had been on the verge of tears, trying her without really daring to invade her personal.

They really had been friends at a certain point, had Or at least, the human had wanted to believe it wanted to keep her as someone who would remember why did she go back in time? Did she not have a

... The scattered flashes that came after that answered her question, and reminded her how had not wanted to actually know the answer.

Papyrus, Undyne, Mettaton, even Asgore — God. Did he really do that? Did that really, actually happen. And then the human just had to make it even
complicated and say that she actually hadn’t called it a time jump — or “Reset”, as she called it. As weren’t insane enough as they were. She needed her coffee. She needed so much coffee.

And yet...
Strangely enough, she also, somehow, felt calm? Obviously was not calm. But, she also reasonably, she should be freaking out way more. Was at this time, actually.

Also... The more images and sounds came back, the fogginess started to clear up, if ever so slightly... Her soul was filled with a unique thought:

**Wow. I was amazing back then.**

No wonder the human missed someone like this now. All such a ball of useless anxiety in comparison. Of being that ball of anxiety. Could it really be possible... to... overcome all her problems?

No, not overcome them. But in another time, she become strong and confident enough to... To speak her mind without fear. To get things to deal with the consequences as they came, in anticipating all kinds of disasters up to the point she could not even make the first step for fear of falling... She had been so strong. She... could become...
She had been so strong. She... *could* become strong once again. She just had to give herself a chance. Or just kick her own butt off her seat and do what she wanted already.

What point was there in dreading another failure if she wasn’t even trying to succeed in the first place...? As she had known the answer to that rhetorical question for years, it was only now that she truly understood it. Now that she had a vague reminiscence of herself on that solution, *embracing* her confidence, did it work like finally, just maybe, she would actually be able to follow this advice— instead of feeling guilty for believing she was too pathetic and miserable to do what everyone else could do so easily.

Upon being more analytical of the behavior other people followed... Maybe she was not the only one feeling this way, contrary to what her anxiety had been telling her. Maybe more people around her felt exactly the same way— overthinking their own selves, feeling bad about being able to reach their own, way too high expectations. She knew that was counterproductive, as much as she was certain that many of these people knew as well.

It would take her time to change her way of thinking, stop worrying about being better instantly, with patience first through a transitional phase. She knew that...
not be immediate, and yet she had still been— because she had wanted exactly that. The move that had been lacking was to, maybe, stop feeling... transition? How much time had it taken her, in time that no longer existed? Did the fact of witnessing disastrous events speed up this process and for her to develop her true potential? Did the view of... dying... paradoxically let her true confident self be?

She did not know whether she would have enough to grow back to being as amazing as these déjà-vu. But... She was okay with that fact. Now that... what her true strength was... She wanted to know. She felt... okay with having to take the messy present self was, and take her time to put it back together. As long as she knew what her goal was, and as long as she knew that she could reach it; she believed that she would. She knew, in all confidence, that one day she would be allowed to go back to being awesome.

She knew that, since it already was hiding somewhere inside... She already was awesome. She only had to show it to the world around her, and to herself. There was only one thing that could potentially stop her from doing so. This simple thing was, another thing that would make her forget everything, once more.

Still... This human, that she had in front of...
supposed to be responsible for this, wasn’t she? She had the power; and she cared enough to want her not-Atherus alive.

A nagging feeling inside her soul reminded her that though she had forgotten the details of what truly was at stake, she knew that there still was a lot of work for her to do. Nonetheless... It was reassuring to know that the others were determined to claim control of the time machine and protect them. It was such a good thing that she had the power to do so, as they would soon prove once and for all.

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She didn’t have enough.

Dozens of thousands of promising scans, of powerful souls located and analyzed, and the standing right inside the Extractor was the only one.

The plan was a failure. He was stuck. He was eternally.

The game would restart. The same days would come again and again and again, and again. How? Why? Why would the universe personally want him to suffer? Why couldn’t there be a perfect plan just— what were the odds? The outcome was supposed to be so implausible, he even bothered to consider the sheer improbability of the event, and pretended that there was simply no chance. The universe would go through something so ridiculous.

Despite himself, a chuckle went out.
How naïve had he been. Of course he would be so. None of his previous plans had worked. Why would one, his so called last resort, be any different. Yes, he had been the point of all this denial and hope and hate. There was nothing he could do to change anything — he had always known that. He was beyond saving — even himself. He should have known that this plan would be just like the previous ones. Why did he even bother?

His dark, repressed sparks of insincere laughter were slowly speeding up. Slowly slipping out of his control. What kind of control did he even have? How much could he get, to think that he could have any control upon anything whatsoever. All his work for nothing, and he had always known that; it was the hard, cold facts. This game’s control was absolute. What made that anything could ever compete? The players of the game? The ones responsible for running it in the first place? Had he needed them for shielding him from their games? Had he merely wanted one of them to know — to experience his pain alongside him?

This wasn’t... This could not be real. Of all the heroes he could have taken, it had to be the only one who could help him even if she wanted to. Except that, hadn’t it just that? That she didn’t want the
sense, wasn’t it just that? That she didn’t want to try enough? That she didn’t want to help him hard enough?

Alphys turned to look at him, finally acknowledging his behavior. “Sans, what are you...”

Yes, Sans. What are you doing? Why are you laughing? What is so funny? For someone pretending to be comedy but who knows full well that you are twisting it for all kinds of purposes other than amusement, surely you must find some kind of hilarious sense in this situation. Just like when I finally realized that most players and non-players would view you as nothing but the punchline of a humorless joke.

He was laughing, but then it hit. The nightmare valiantly struggled and plotted against would be nothing but the numbing sense of this fact, there was nothing but all at the same time, the growing shreds of an numbness.

Still. There was mostly pain. Denial. Anger.

He had made sure that everything would work out. Taken as many safety measures as he possibly could. His plan could not fail. Why did the one thing that was out of his control, but that he had thought to have be unquestionably not a problem to him, just—
that one tiny, inconsequential yet so impossibly in detail decide to backfire on him like this, just to see

Why did she have to be the exception? What did she do to deserve this? Nothing he did could ever compare to they did— whose fault was this? It certainly wasn’t because of him, then it was...

What was even the point. Even from here, they were still playing with him, with no consequences, one who would suffer from consequences— lest something even worse and irrevocable happen to the entirety of the Underground, something that could not be turned back even if everything else did.

He had started to mutter things, like a mantra, as if these nonsensical words could change his fate. In he would whisper in a trembling voice, shaking from right to left and left to right as if claiming he would make it indeed as impossible as he wished it to be to erase this event from reality. I can’t do this, he would say, Not again, he would repeat under his breath.

Ironically, as he knew full well but dared not consider, “Not again” was not even the beginning of the day of what the nightmare to come was going to be like.

With a second human in the equation. With a human needed not to die, but who could not fight an
Looking after his own life and sanity was hard. Now, looking after somebody else at the same time... It was going to be different. It was going to be the worst. It was going to be worse. So, so much worse. He could not do it. Not again. Not like this. Not...

A shriek brutally yanked him out of his thoughts into reality— the first rational thought that traveled through his soul was that given its intensity, it was not the first, and that he had been too absorbed in his mind to notice the first ones.

The second rational thought came when he opened his eye-sockets.


The sight alone was too much to bear. Not again. There was no gold, no red, but he could see them nonetheless. This was too much for reason. What even is reason if not for making you suffer even more.

It had just started, and he already failed.

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From her location inside the Extractor, une
From her location inside the Extractor, and clichédly wired to multiple bits of machinery and with lots of strings and small electrodes on her chest, Dawn could not see much, and only guessed results would be by judging Alphys and Sans’s at least until they came to her and gave her full explanations once the experiment would be over.

The experiment in itself was not as scary as it looked. The goat skull shape was still intriguing and she had understanding its purpose, but she could only imagine it certainly had one; and that thankfully, that purpose was not to eat her alive or anything as stupid as that was meant to measure how much determination she had, or something like that, so she had expected to be involved; and indeed, soon after the machine turned on, that big cyan heart started glowing as fuzzy and weird as usual. But, at least, there was such as pain or discomfort other than what she was getting used to with all these monsters showing around every now and then. Compared to all the scientist tropes that could have applied here, she quickly reassured to meet none of them. All in “experiment” had truly felt like it was meant to be but a regular medical checkup, in some way.

She waited patiently, looking from afar at the equipment to be right next but there would be no sign...
and trying to decipher what they could be seeing anxious, but she wanted to feel as confident as for that things would be fine. She hoped that they would turn out to be right about this, and her wrong. After had not been responsible for this Reset, then why
For minutes, there was nothing but silence. And slowly... Sans started to gradually lose it.
She knew what this meant, but all at the same time her brain did not immediately make the connection she refused to reach that obvious conclusion; she could only focus on one thing: Sans was losing.
She tried to call out to him; Alphys did, too; it was too could not hear them, or as if they had ceased to him; as if they did not matter anymore.
She tried to rush back towards them, so she could Alphys and more generally, try to help solve what happening. Unfortunately, the wires and electro reminded her of her situation, and she found herself no choice but to remove them one by one until she move away. She had assumed that the experiment over by then, so they wouldn’t mind, would they? Her tedious unwrapping activity was cut short with a sudden, everything got worse.

Thundering noises. Fleeting sparks of white. And the Alphys had taken cover, although she kept shout
persevering attempt to call out to Sans, begging him to hold of himself. Dawn desperately tried to do the same, but the wires maintained her in place; out in the cold.

The bullets were too small, too incidental, to have any shape. Most felt like tiny needles because of the heat, or maybe they were tiny, accidental deformed bullets. It burned when it hit, yet it was freezing. It did not hurt too much, but it certainly felt pain in a different, non-physical way. She had no idea how this worked. She didn’t know if it was what was happening or if she was imagining it.

It was so cold. So lonely. It smelled like anger, and like pain. It was simultaneously asking the question and shooting the answers that it did not want to accept that it was starting to believe in nonetheless.

The desperation, the anger... They still felt representative despite the fact that they were exploding out into the world for all to see, they were still trying to contain the anger. The anger was directed at various elements, accusing yet defending them against those same accusations at the same time. There was fear, and an unexpectedly broken compassion. There was denial, and there was hate. Had she been screaming? She didn’t know. The cold was all that she knew.
to be ascertained was that her cheeks felt two nanometers and warm trails. For a moment, all there was the universe was a pair of black socks looking back, painful sorrow those sockets had sent at her.

It was only when everything stopped that her body came back to her senses. The pain of burns must have processed and pressed itself in her brain, and as a survival instinct narrowed down the cause of the discomfort to its only possible source. The fear of a bunny facing lights came in her eyes. The glance the skeleton had started giving her back an instant earlier gained sparks of realization. Despite herself, an irrational shiver ran down her spine.

The next moment, Sans was gone.

What... was this place? It looked familiar, but he did not see these purple walls in such an insanely long time. How did he arrive here? He had not put much thought in his destination; he still wasn’t putting conscious thought into anything, truth be told.

He collapsed on the ground. He did not know when he landed in the Ruins, he did not know how he had to get past the supposedly impassable closed door. He had never considered the possibility that he could ever have the capability to find a way past it; but he did...
the capability to find a way past it, but he didn’t. For all he knew, he had landed not too far from where the player would go. Maybe he was on their path. Maybe the player would find him blocking their way by lying on the floor like this and just end him right here and now so they could continue their run undisturbed. That would be peachy, wouldn’t it. It would be a great reason to skip this iteration and escape from all this mess.

Footsteps were coming. He wouldn’t have to wait.

There was a soundless, but still audible gasp. That wasn’t the player. Oh well.

“Oh dear— are you quite alright?”

... No. No way.

That voice— that face... Was it really her? He had not seen her in an eternity. When was the last time they had met face to face? He wouldn’t be surprised... the game, or whatever caused it to take place, had predated... the game, or whatever caused it to take place.

Too tired to care, yet too surprised to meet with his friend he had not been able to see in so long, he supposed to have never met at all, he said her name.

Recollection and horror flashed in the old lady’s eyes, not needing any other sound from his voice to recognize the young adult monster laying on the floor.
Hardly a second after Sans’s disappearance, Alphys jumped out of her hiding spot and rushed to the human. She had made all these good reasons only to let everyone down as soon as things were good. Good job, Alphys. Good job.

Thankfully, when she arrived to her level and examined the damage, the injuries weren’t as serious as she had thought. Those were some nasty burn marks, typically the ones that would appear only on humans’ bodies due to the lizard’s ability to handle most monsters’ bullets regardless of intensity. Thankfully, there wasn’t any blood in sight, and the human was obviously still conscious and talking to her, although she was in shock regarding what had occurred during the past few days. Needless to say, the first thing the lizard had to do was pull the human from the remaining wires and electrodes still attached to her; doing that seemed to pull Dawn out of her panic as she immediately followed through and finished the exam she had started earlier.

Still, this simple task did not seem to distract her by much. Seeing the fear and confusion on the teenager’s face, the scientist soon felt compelled to explain:

“You, uh, you know how monsters ex... themselves through their m-magic, right? W-well it’s thankfully rare b-because it only happens when we’re under...
Dawn looked down, thinking about a certain in spot inside her chest. “S-sometimes bullets appear even if you don’t want to...?”

“Something like that. He didn’t want hurt anyone, I’m sure. It’s just When monsters are overwhelmed by intense emotions, sometimes they j

Seeing as the yellow lizard was uneasily avoiding contact and prolonged her pause to an extent than usual, the human found herself finishing sentence awkwardly, sending her a sad smile and tense shrug “... Snap?”

Alphys restrained a dire chuckle. “Y-yes, maybe. O-or, a l-lot. I’ve never seen so... crushed.”

The human’s eyes wandered away once more, shame. She had seen Sans’s hopes ramping up, seen his confidence in his plan build and build and only seeing the first specks of weakness when he spiraled down because of Asgore.

Well, you know what they say. The harder you fall... When she thought about it, this wasn’t the first she was seeing a monster snap back when she
she was seeing a monster snap; back when she had seen Alphys for the very first time, there had been this moment when she had let her frustration explode around the beast. There had been no bullets and no real threat but the sound of thunder, the invisible but ever-present and ominous manifestation of thousands of conflicting emotions... They were proof that Alphys’s emotions were nowhere near as intense as what Sans just went through. 

Dawn took a deep breath, still trying to release the tension and adrenaline her fear had spread throughout her bloodstream. “Where did he go...?”

“I don’t know.” she shook her head, looking down. “But... He’ll be back. He needs some more time to... c-cool down somewhere he won’t hurt a-anyone... I sup-pose.”

The human seemed willing to continue the conversation, but the lizard rushed away, before coming back with a first-aid kit that looked like a smaller-than-usual first-aid kit. Right. She was injured. It was almost funny how she had felt numb instead of painful... It might not be n
a good sign, though.
Alphys rummaged a lot through the small suitcase, shaking her head discreetly but nervously, or in short words about how the various tools and pieces wouldn’t be of any use.
Well, this first-aid kit was certainly meant to be for injured monsters instead of humans, so it was safe to assume most of this stuff wouldn’t be too relevant here.

“In the game, monster food can heal anything as it’s related to HP, I think. Shouldn’t that work?”

Alphys stopped dead in her tracks, dropping what she had in her claws at this time. She shuddered for a fleeting moment, reminiscing that, yes—this was the real game. This was why this human was here in the first place. This was why everything was so important. Sans was so horrified to realize that they were why it was so terrible that his plan had failed. Because now they were just as stuck as before. Had failed to regain what little freedom video game characters could ever dream to obtain.
If this was a video game, then… Didn’t it mean they had no other purpose to their entire existence—entertain? To be disposable, respawning pawns?

“… R-right… Right. Here.”
Brushing aside these depressing thoughts, Alphys gave the human a small box of pills lying at the bottom of her first-aid kit.

“That usually helps a lot when monsters are hurt.” she explained, looking away. “It’s sure it should be nearly as effective when it comes to healing a human, but if you say that monster food is like that…”

The teenager tried to interrupt her by thanking her with a warm smile, then with comforting words; but the brunette’s expression was one of intense pain, so what could she say? Hearing Alphys stutter this made the scene all the more painful to watch; and although she could not read her mind, it was not difficult to guess—so much had happened in hardly an hour, and from her perspective, she had been dropped with all those memories and then forgotten, then been forced to reminisce all at once. It was easy to understand her pain... And it was hard to know what to do to relieve it. Surely she would only ever be trying to help with random clichéd words.

Dawn took one pill immediately, just so she could have an excuse not to talk for at least the next couple of minutes. It was too bad that monster food naturally dissipated in thin air within exactly that amount of time. She didn’t feel too much better afterwards, but the pills were a temporary fix.
She didn’t feel too much better afterwards, but the majority of the pain had gone away as soon as she woke up. Maybe there just wasn’t any “magic curing effect,” though, noticed in this specific case. She still felt a bit itchy from the small but numerous burn marks on her skin, though.

Oh well. It wasn’t like they had any better options.

“...I don’t have enough determination after all.”

The only way she found to get back in action was to come up with something obvious, but then again, she never did like confirmation of that fact besides Sans’s meltdown.

Still, when Alphys looked down and shook her head, there was no more doubt to be allowed; so they take this now established fact, and figure out why.

“Am I too far off? Maybe you’ve still got some vials left or wherever you’re stockining it, but...”

Alphys jumped three feet in the air, fidgeting in panic.

“H-h-how do you know I-!?” Then she started to shake the bed. She pursed her lips, keeping a hand in the air pointed nothing. She once more remembered that had been previously established regarding the fact that the specific human teenager and her creepily extensive knowledge. Then she buried her forehead into her hands and sighed. “H. Never mind. G-go
Dawn bit her bottom lip, once more remembering it was too little too late to mind her tongue and was trying too hard to think of the sake of everyone’s sanity. “S-sorry... I suppose giving me more determination one way or another isn’t an option...?”

If anything, these words only made the girl’s mouth tremble even more. “Y-you w-want...? I-i don’t know, I...” She closed her eyes and took a long, deep breath. “Y-you know what happened when I... Y-you know monsters can’t have determination. Humans naturally have a lot more, but... For all we know, m-m... humans have a limit too!”

“But I’m supposed to already have four times the strength than a human from here, right?”

“I-I know Sans said that, but even so, it’s supposed to be the normal amount for a human like you, i-its not normal amount for you specifically Alphys had started pacing around the controls of the Determination Extractor with haste and anxious breathing faster and faster every second. “I hardly know anything about— T-there’s too risky, I-I c-can’t allow that—"

Oh boy. “A-Alphys, it’s okay!”
Oh boy. ‘A-Alphys, it’s okay!’

Dawn’s first idea was to rush and hug the hyperventilating lizard, but just in case she could be intruding her privacy, she decided to limp to her and put a single hand on her shoulder. They exchanged a glance, and the human tried to show a reassuring smile. It wasn’t really genuine due to the disappointment she was trying to hide, but he was still to give Alphys the comfort she definitely needed. She had done so much for them already.

“Fine. We won’t take that option.” Yet, at the same time, “I had another idea anyway.”

The scientist blinked in shock and with a heart full of hope. “Y-you do?”

Seeing how almost all of her tremors and fear disappeared in a flash, it was easy to realize how relieved she had been. Injections of dubious products were not their only option. Understanding that and being secretly relieved, Dawn nodded confidently.

“There’s been a Reset, and I didn’t do it.” the scientist reasoned out loud so the scientist could hear. “That can only mean that someone wanted to and Reset their game, right?”

The dumbfounded lizard blinked in surprise.
The dumbfounded lizard blinked in surprise, strictly no idea how the game was supposed to work in the first place. “U-um. M-maybe?”
That sounded logical and intuitive enough, but probably was how it was supposed to work.

Taking Alphys’s approval for granted, she continued. “We should confront them as soon as possible. I’m sure that as soon as we let them know what’s going on, they’ll want to help.”

The lizard’s confusion increased, this time with growing as well. “C-confront— wait—”

“Don’t worry, I know how the story goes, and what the players are supposed to do. I know the game’s done a lot of harm, but I know the players don’t really mean it and that they’ll stop. Let them know what’s going on.”

“W-wait, humans are danger— I-i m obviously you’re one too, but...” A deep breath. “It’s p-probably best if we could... at least find a strategy first.”

Dawn blinked, then showed a smile of amusement. “I already have a strategy. Step one, I talk to the player. Step two, they’ll be so confused and forget, they’ll know we’re not kidding and that they...”
not playing a regular video game. Now I just need help getting to the Ruins’ door before they get here; we can meet up before they cause too much trouble.

Alphys immediately went in front, politely blocking the limping human’s way. “Oooh, we at least wait until you’re able to walk properly before you jump to certain death.”

“It’s not gonna be certain death, we’ll just talk.”

“Please just let me disagree on this, the lizard deadpanned. “I don’t know how the game works, but if it can kill, how do you know the game won’t just kill you for another enemy or something? Maybe the game won’t let you talk!”

Dawn wanted to argue; but, soon her mouth closed as she considered the option. Even in battle, the encounters weren’t allowed to talk; but it did not change the fact that the player was the one to make the choices. The situation was to prevent the encounter from occurring in place, but how could she ensure that it would play that way? She wanted to believe that if the player was given the option to kill or spare her, after her speech about obliterating the fourth wall and being real, they would have to be prepared.
being real, they would happen to be a normal, same being and not an actual serial killer in real life.

But... *would* she be convincing enough? Underline known for breaking the fourth wall in a multitude right from the beginning. What would be the believable solution between the game being real sudden appearance being an extremely rare event kind? Not to mention the fact that the game patched just a month earlier and that some days were still looking for minor changes in the game.

“Look— I’ll send Sans a text to let know and he’ll come as soon as he Alphys eventually offered, raising her cell phone emphasis. “Let’s wait for him first.”

The teenager sighed dejectedly, but she had to agree. Yeah. Maybe they needed to think things through more than she had anticipated. She wanted to be patient; this was what made so easily as soon as Alphys gave her the option. But... Could they really afford to be patient in this

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“Please do not take this the wrong I am overjoyed to finally meet you to face, but... How exactly were you to make your way past the door?”
There was an absent-minded shrug. “not really, i wasn’t thinkin straight when that happened.”

His answer was surprisingly genuine. You would not expect an outsider found lying on the ground, wearing pajamas on the wrong side of the Ruins’ door, to have at least a skeleton in his closet, so to speak. But at least his answer did definitely not sound like a lie.

Sans sighed, looking down at the teacup in his hands. Just some time ago, he was drinking tea with parsnips but all at the same time, that never happened.

It was always so disorienting to have fresh meat eating, while your body actually hadn’t taken in anything since the “previous day.” Everything he had eaten during the past timeline; right now, hunger was more and more striking. Whether Toriel had noticed he had been quick to offer him the first thing she had in hand. Chocolate was a relatively good choice, and some monster candy at the ready.

In the corner of the table was a basket full of friends. The smell of cinnamon could barely escape; it was trapped within a prison from which, for once, it was never taken out of for at least a few more hours...

Looks like there won’t be pie this time. It was too long to prepare.
He hesitated, but soon he spoke. “my turn to tell the human fell down a bit earlier, right?”

Toriel’s face was contorted in shock.

“I... I asked them to wait further from the Ruins until I return. Although, I have a feeling that they...”

“They won’t listen.”

The former queen of the Underground closed her eyes, taking a deep breath.

“If I may ask... how can you possibly feel so much?”

Another pained sigh. “I don’t know nearly as much as you think. I just... saw it all happen all the way too many times.”

For some strange reason, Toriel did not feel as sure of herself as she believed she should. What he was referring to was impossible; and yet, somehow... it felt true. Why did this... She had suspected it herself; first upon seeing the new human child, and now... No more doubt was possible.

“I feel foolish. I unleashed a human in these Ruins, without supervision. I believe in humans, yet somehow, I am unsure which side I should be on...”
unsure which side I should be worried about in this specific case.

The skeleton remained silent. He gave a single nod just to show that he was listening, but... He already knew where this conversation was going.

“Strangest of all... I have this feeling when you have a routine... It just feels comforting to fit, because it is less frightening diving into the unknown? Ever since child arrived, I have felt...comp to follow a routine. It should be first time, and yet... It is all familiar. Too familiar.”

The former queen of the Underground did not respond to this, once more. Yet, anyone could tell she knew something about this phenomenon.

Her look became stern; or at least, it attempted to. She found it hard to show coldness in her expression, she already knew how much pain her friend from the door was feeling; as he had for a very long time. She closed her eyes for a short moment.

“Sans. I have known your voice for years, without ever learning your
“it has.”

Sans found himself clenching his teeth, realizing too late that he had actually said these two words. A look of intense pain and concern washed over the monster’s muzzle.

“How many times, if I may ask...?”

He looked away, sighing. They all asked that one question, and he always only had one answer to give.

“I lost track a long time ago.”

He wanted to stop there, but...

“I thought it’d be over. I’d done everything to make it stop. Everything had worked up to this point. I really, honestly thought...”

The end of his sentence was replaced with broken sobs. It did not last long, but even after it stopped, the disbelief remained on his skull.

“But I failed. the cycle’s gonna start again, there’s nothing I can do to stop it. that was r...
Toriel carefully weighted her words for almost a minute, choosing the softest tone she could afford.

“I apologize in advance for stating the obvious. You already considered asking for help earlier than now, I pressume she suggested shyly and compassionately.

“pretty sure i asked everyone on the other side of the door at least once. might be wrong ‘cause it was a while ago... but i think i really tried to be thorough as possible.”

He had said this with a relatively neutral tone, as if expecting a straightforward answer honestly and precisely to the question. A quick look found him tightening the grip on his tool. 

“but they... they can’t remember anything. the reason you can trigger déjà-vu around them because we’re supposed to have never met the others... they know me too much already they already know everything, before i could even tell them anything. and yet they know nothing.”

The old lady remained silent, looking down helplessly.

“Isn’t there anything I can do...?”
“nah. 'fraid there isn't.”

Another heavy breath.

“This child I found this morning. They present a true danger, do they not? I insist guiltily. “Yet, I still feel... thoughts upon seeing them. They used to be different.” They used to be alive.

The skeleton remained silent for much longer than he would have preferred. There was no possible answer that would feel natural.
He looked down and to the side, averting her eyes.

“... i can’t ask you to hold them off. they'll kill...”

Toriel’s head hung slowly, subtly bouncing up and down uncertainly without her realizing it. Subconsciously, some part of her knew he was right. She knew that under normal circumstances, she would have tried to protect this child from leaving the Ruins, at least.

“Could there not be a way to simply...?"

The skull shook categorically. “just stay away from them. you don’t wanna know the rest.”

“What do you suggest, then?”
“stay away from them.” he replied instantly, giving
“stay here. stay safe.”

There was a pause of rebuttal and quiet, childish.
But soon, acceptance came. There was a docile, sad

Sans started to wonder whether there were some
to prevent things from getting any worse.
For a moment, he considered telling her about the
he had brought from another world, and how
required to remain safe... Toriel would definitely
of her the way she would with any other human
the teenager would certainly respect her new one
to keep her company, and hopefully, remain patient
despite the Resets that would inevitably make her

everything on a regular basis. But... Something
stopping him from doing so. Was it some lingering
stupid hope that maybe, just maybe, this human
something to solve their situation? Was it the
loneliness?

He... He did not want to be alone again. He should
thinking about this— this was foolish, this teenager
even that likeable at all to begin with, she had now
defend herself, he wouldn’t be able to handle protecting
himself and protecting a doofus like her all at the
same time, but— he could not... Not again. He couldn’t
all over again. Never. He would break. More than he already had...

He was falling back into yet another spiral of destructive thoughts, alone and afraid of a future he would never come and yet was already there at the same time.

Thankfully... alone, he was not.

“You said that caring was the key to remembering events from past iterations. Did you not?”

The old lady received a silent and tired nod as answer. Despite her sadness and compassion upon seeing friend’s despair, a warm and motherly smile grew upon her muzzle, as she gently cupped the skeleton’s chin, and glared back to her.

“Well, then. I can already tell you that caring will also be the key to breaking this tragic cycle. I just know it.

There was a weak chuckle. Caring... how? What you did or said would ever matter, caring meant nothing. Why should anyone persevere when it was hopeless?

“You are lucky, Sans. There are so few friends and relatives around you. We love you, Sans. We are all behind...
Please do not ever doubt this. Because, we care... Your actions will always matter.
We will come and help you.”

His actions... They really did not matter, no matter how many times a naïvely optimistic soul would say otherwise. The only reason anyone from his side of the Rufus Rectangle would remember anything through the time loops Alphys had during this specific iteration was because he had been there to trigger something entirely new.

But then... maybe that was it? Maybe he could use some sort of catalyst to help everyone else remember something. Then again... Did he want anyone to remember anything?

If the loops could still not be stopped despite everyone's efforts at once, wouldn’t it be selfish to put everyone through the same misery he was living...?

His train of thoughts was interrupted when a sound and sensation occurred. He lazily raised his phone and looked at his newly-received text:

[ FROM: Alphys – 10:01 AM ]
Hey Sans, hope ur doing better!! Ur free to come back whenever u want. Btw just so u know we’re on our way to Snowdin cos it’ll be easier for us to rest. Meet u there whenever!!

Toriel could obviously not see what the messenger was typing about or who had sent this message, but this was not her problem. She wondered...
prevent her from chuckling warmly.

“See? They really are worried about you. The younger monster couldn’t help but chuckle weakly, but with a small spark of sincerity now. Before he could say anything, his phone vibrated more, adding another precision to the lizard’s last words.

[ FROM: Alphys – 10:02 AM ]
Dawn says she has a plan.

“I believe this means it must be time for you to reunite with them, does it not?” She was right. He felt somehow too overwhelmed to process what these messages were about, what they could be about, whether these girls were careless. He found himself unable to think any further when a pair of gigantic arms surround him softly and hugging against a warm, motherly chest.

“Please come back if you ever feel this again. I do not want you to be alone, understood? Remember that you are not. You have friends and family that care about you, even if they forget trivial events.”

“… time loops ain’t really “trivial” stuff, to think.”

“They are compared to the eternal...
They are compared to the other half that we love you.” she winked jokingly, but with a sincere, knowing smile. “This is what victory and triumph in the end. I just know it will be."

He still had his doubts. He knew that these words of encouragement were closer to idealistic dreams than real-world wisdom, and he knew that it would take a whole lot more than an old lady’s words for actions and consequences to truly cement his hopes and make them a reality. He knew that he was too busy living to think about these words to be enough.

Still... The fuzzy warmth of her embrace was just enough to let him dream, for a few instants. For a moment, he caught himself believing that maybe, just maybe, this was just might be hope for healing. In a very, very large sense. But... just maybe? Ironically, they literally had all the time they needed in the world for a miracle like this to eventually happen. The odds were stacked in their favor, even if only one specific, impossible iteration of the loop.

Between hope and despair, coldly rational certainty, and the fear of the unknown... An old, ancestral feeling thought long forgotten, finally managed to emerge and flutter in the deepest core of his soul. He was loved, he realized, not because of what he was, but because of who he loved in return. He had friends who all worried about him, certainly as much as he used to worry about his own self. As much as he was worrying for them in this very moment. Worrying...? Well, there was a more fitting word. As his old, lovely friend had put it... the word was wonderful.
If you want a good old, eye-roll-inducing euphemism, today was *not* Alphys’s best example of a “normal day.”

She had woken up. She had gone to her office, ready to start a new day of work which she perfectly knew would only be another day of full procrastination, at least until Mettaton showed up so she’d have an excuse to finally do something she enjoyed doing — building machines.

On that note… part of her wanted to slow her progress down because, hey— what if once his new body was done, he decided to stop visiting her altogether? Who would she be able to confide in without bothering Undyne? What else would she be able to build in order to feel like she was finally doing something at least somewhat useful…?

Either way. Her plans for the day had *not* included an intruding Sans, who apparently was now a *time traveler* of all things, despite the scientific fact that monsters had been proven *centuries ago* to be biologically unable to remember time jumps through any conventional means.

She had *not* planned to have another intruder, a *human* on top of that, about to visit the laboratory’s basement and test her soul’s determination level in the Extractor.

And she… had not been ready for that human to be so familiar in all the wrong ways, and to look so utterly destroyed to realize firsthand that she had no direct recollection of the interactions they may have had in a time that no longer existed. Let alone had she been ready for the existential crisis material that followed.

The human had looked so earnestly desperate, she had been willing to humor her and try to see if she could somehow, by some kind of *déjà-vu* miracle, at least “remember” a few things. Mind you,
“remembering” is a misuse of the word: it is strictly impossible to actually remember events that have been, by definition, fully erased from the apparent course of time. But still…

She knew how déjà-vu was supposed to work. Research had been established long ago, in order to try and understand its mechanisms. The current theoretical model monsterkind had come up with had quite a few predictions about how déjà-vu could be triggered and exploited in order to, if not remember per se, at least recollect shreds and tiny remnants of these erased times so one could acknowledge these events.

The main element of this model, which could explain the mechanisms of déjà-vu but had admittedly only been discovered very recently, had a very simple yet counter-intuitive conclusion: true time travel… did not actually exist.

A time jump never consisted in “going back in time”, contrary to what its deceitful name implied. In fact, it was nothing but an optical illusion to the caster.

Time jumps really were never anything other than merely using the power of your determination in order to picture a given time in the past, and use it as reference to force the universe to somehow manipulate its entropy until it appeared that the universe had gone back to a state in which it very much looked like the past. Except that it was not really the past; it was nothing but a recreation of it.

Which meant that as powerful as this caster could be, it was never perfect. Bits and pieces of the present always remained, even if they should have become inaccessible.

But then, from that point, if the right trigger can be found and exploited properly… More and more of these pieces can resurface, until almost all of them are back.

These pieces are the déjà-vu; finding one piece can, through a chain reaction, lead to others, triggering more and more déjà-vu until you feel like you have almost found all of these pieces, and possibly reconstituted everything.

But as wonderful as this method sounds, it is, yet again, never a perfect and complete process. You can only ever retrieve the pieces: it does not necessarily mean that you will be able to put the jigsaw puzzle back in place on your own. Moreover, it also means that this reconstruction is very susceptible to any kinds of exterior inputs and suggestions. If time travelers were to find someone in the middle of this process and trying to “remember”, it could be easy for them to tweak those pieces of memories in their favor, depending on their intentions. Pieces without context can be very easily misunderstood, and if someone reconstitutes a false version of an erased timeline, it is very unlikely for them to ever know what truly happened.

This is when, hopefully… Another factor had to enter the equation. The second requirement for déjà-vu to merely occur in the first place was still a theory, and it was understandably difficult to effectively prove whether this element truly had any part in allowing a monster to reminisce details that no longer existed, or not.

Still, many believed its part in the existence of déjà-vu to be undeniable, simply because it made
the most sense: déjà-vu was an ability of the soul, after all. It was logical for the key to unlock this ability to be of emotional nature.

This second requirement… was implied to be an emotional attachment to what was forgotten. It was theorized that the stronger impact an event left on a monster’s mind before time would jump back, the more likely they were to have déjà-vu about it. Happy memories… Events that a monster wished to treasure and never forget… These were supposed to be the easiest memories to trigger.

Now, all this… This was, to her at least, merely the theory. As far as she could remember truly, she had never experienced déjà-vu before, and she had never known anyone who had — because if she ever had, those times have been later erased as well. In all honesty, she… was not sure what to think. She wanted to trust Sans, and Sans apparently trusted this human, who was injured, but who seemed to care more about her forgetting than about said injury…

Well. She couldn’t exactly say “no” to a face like this one. Besides, this could be a benefit too, for science? It was… time to check whether their theory was right or not.

Had she been… emotionally attached to that human, in a different time? What she subconsciously wanted to feel while seeing her face was an incomprehensible sense of compassion, and calm — this was a human, and yet she somehow knew she had nothing to fear from this one — contrary to what she intuitively knew she would feel while facing a… different one. Had there been more than just one human at some point? No, maybe she was digging a little too much into this.

This human definitely wanted her to “remember.” Could it be that she saw themselves as… friends? Somewhat? The small tug in her soul made her reason that maybe it had been just the beginning of a true friendship— a small bud of kindness that hadn’t had enough time to bloom into full friendship just yet.

Still, all this put aside; the strangest impulse she had was that upon looking at this human, she… felt an immensely strong need to protect her. At this point, it was beyond the mere stage of caring for an individual — it felt like a mission. It felt like the safety of this human… was linked to the safety of all of monsterkind as well, as paradoxical and nonsensical as this was supposed to be.

In order to start small, she had tried to offer the only blatantly obvious option as to what kind of pleasant activity they could have done together, in order to learn to bond in some way. If they had spent any time at all having fun over something, surely it had to do with nerding out over a series of some kind, hadn’t it…?

Of all things that teen could have used as a first trigger… Well, she had certainly gone straight to the point; that felt like it was the best way to put it.

Had they spent some time nerding out over a fandom? Certainly they had. It just… definitely wasn’t the kind of fandom she had expected to see.
The human just *had* to show her these cartoon images on her rectangle machine— wait, no. It was a phone. This was how phones looked back where she was from. That wasn’t the kind of phones one could find in the Dump, but that was because *this* specific human did not come from the Surface. Not the one they knew. Yes, this train of thought seemed accurate… It was stupid, but it felt right.

And when she had seen those cartoony images… damn. Talk about a thought storm.

How could someone have in their phone’s memory images, sounds, all related to her and, somehow, other monsters she knew vaguely or closely? With so many different styles, there could only be so many different artists behind them, so many people who somehow knew about them without having ever seen them before…

. . . except that they *had*. She could even tell *how*.

This was all just a game. Her own existence— could this really be? Yes, it was; they had discussed it. She could not remember the words, but blurry images and sorry voices and deep shared feelings had made their way in her mind, as they resurfaced from whichever shadowy part of her unconscious soul they had previously retreated to. And not only that, but… Why did she feel like she missed everyone? Like she hadn’t seen Undyne, or Mettaton, or Papyrus in *so long*, and…

She didn’t want to accept these feelings. They were wrong. Everything was so, *so* wrong. They had to be lying, right? Except that they had not even said a single word. They had just left her with those images, as undeniable proof.

How could these images remain despite the time jump? Because they were out of the loop — they did not *belong* in the loop. And that human did not either. They were a *player* of that *game*. A game that had countless times torn the Underground apart and taken lives, and…

She remembered that the human had tried to catch her in her arms at that time; she did not remember losing her balance, but she had definitely started to feel faint enough for that to become a likely event. She remembered that the human had been on the verge of tears, trying to hug her without really daring to invade her personal space.

They really had been friends at a certain point, hadn’t they? Or at least, the human had wanted to believe it. So if she wanted to keep her as someone who would remember her, why did she go back in time? Did she not have a choice…?

… The scattered flashes that came after that quickly answered her question, and reminded her how
much she had not wanted to actually know the answer.

Papyrus, Undyne, Mettaton, even Asgore — God, Asgore! Did he really do that? Did that really, actually happen…?

And then the human just had to make it even more complicated and say that she actually hadn’t caused that time jump — or “Reset”, as she called it. As if things weren’t insane enough as they were.

She needed her coffee. She needed so much coffee.

And yet…

Strangely enough, she also, somehow, felt calm? Well, she obviously was not calm. But, she also reasoned that logically, she should be freaking out way more than she was at this time, actually.

Also… The more images and sounds came back and the fogginess started to clear up, if ever so slightly… The more her soul was filled with a unique thought:

Wow. I was amazing back then.

No wonder the human missed someone like this. She was now such a ball of useless anxiety in comparison. She hated being that ball of anxiety. Could it really be possible for her to… overcome all her problems?

No, not overcome them. But in another time, she had just… become strong and confident enough to do things. To speak her mind without fear. To get things to move and deal with the consequences as they came, instead of anticipating all kinds of disasters up to the point when she could not even make the first step for fear of failing.

She had been so strong. She… could become so strong, once again. She just had to give herself a chance, maybe. Or just kick her own butt off her seat and do whatever she wanted already.

What point was there in dreading another failure if she wasn’t even trying to succeed in the first place…? As much as she had known the answer to that rhetorical question for years, it was only now that she truly understood. Only now that she had a vague reminiscence of herself acting on that solution, embracing her confidence, did she feel like finally, just maybe, she would actually be able to follow this advice — instead of feeling guilty for believing that she was too pathetic and miserable to do what everybody else could do so easily.
Upon being more analytical of the behavior others around her followed… Maybe she was not the only one feeling that way, contrary to what her anxiety had been telling her. Maybe more people around her felt exactly the same way — overthinking their own selves, feeling bad upon not being able to reach their own, way too high expectations. She knew that was counterproductive, as much as she was certain that many of these people knew as well.

It would take her time to change her way of thinking and stop worrying about being better instantly, without going first through a transitional phase. She knew that it could not be immediate, and yet she had still been paralyzed because she had wanted exactly that. The moving force that had been lacking was to, maybe, stop fearing the transition? How much time had it taken her, in that last time that no longer existed? Did the fact of witnessing such disastrous events speed up this process and force her to develop her true potential? Did the view of monsterkind dying… paradoxically let her true confident self be reborn?

She did not know whether she would have enough time to grow back to being as amazing as these déjà-vu showed her. But… She was okay with that fact. Now that she knew what her true strength was… She wanted to nurture it. She felt… okay with having to take the mess that her present self was, and take her time to put it back in order. As long as she knew what her goal was, and as long as she knew that she could reach it; she believed that she would. She knew, in all confidence, that one day she would be allowed to go back to being awesome.

She knew that, since it already was hiding somewhere inside… She already was awesome. She only had to prove it to the world around her, and to herself.

There was only one thing that could potentially stop her from doing so. This simple thing was, another time jump that would make her forget everything, once more.

Still… This human, that she had in front of her, was supposed to be responsible for this, wasn’t she? She had the power; and she cared enough to want her not to forget.

A nagging feeling inside her soul reminded her that, even though she had forgotten the details of what truly was at stake, she knew that there still was a lot of work to do.

Nonetheless… It was reassuring to know that this human was determined to claim control of the timeline and protect them. It was such a good thing that she had enough power to do so, as they would soon prove once and for all.

She didn’t have enough.

Dozens of thousands of promising scans, of insanely powerful souls located and analyzed, and the single one standing right inside the Extractor was the only exception.
The plan was a failure. He was stuck. He was eternally stuck. The game would restart. The same days would restart again and again and again, and again. How? Why? Did the universe personally want him to suffer? Why couldn’t such a perfect plan just— what were the odds? This kind of outcome was supposed to be so implausible, he had not even bothered to consider the sheer improbability of such event, and pretended that there was simply no way the universe would go through something so ridiculous.

Despite himself, a chuckle went out.

How naïve had he been. Of course he would be sent back. None of his previous plans had worked. Why would this one, his so called last resort, be any different. What had been the point of all this denial and hope and hard work? There was nothing he could do to change anything; he had always known that. He was beyond saving— everything was. He should have known that this plan would fail just like the previous ones. Why did he even bother? Why…

His dark, repressed sparks of insincere laughter carried on; slowly speeding up. Slowly slipping out of his control.

What kind of control did he even have? How much stupider could he get, to think that he could have any ounce of control upon anything whatsoever. All his work had been for nothing, and he had always known that; it was high time he faced the hard, cold facts.

This game’s control was absolute. What made him think that anything could ever compete? The players of this game? The ones responsible for running it in the first place? Had he needed them for shielding him from their game, or had he merely wanted one of them to know— to feel— to experience his pain alongside him?

This wasn’t… This could not be real. Of all the humans he could have taken, it had to be the only one who could not help him even if she wanted to. Except that, hey— in a sense, wasn’t it just that? That she didn’t want things hard enough? That she didn’t want to help him hard enough…?

Alphys turned to look at him, finally acknowledging his behavior. “Sans, w-what are you…”

Yes, Sans. What are you doing? Why are you laughing? What is so funny? For someone pretending to know comedy but who knows full well that you’re just twisting it for all kinds of purposes other than actual amusement, surely you must find some kind of twisted, hilarious sense in this situation. Just like when you finally realized that most players and non-players see you as nothing but the punchline of a humorless joke.

He was laughing, but then it hit. The nightmare he had so valiantly struggled and plotted against would continue; and when he truly realized the obvious yet unacceptable consequences of this fact, there was nothing but pain and, all at the same time, the growing shreds of an irrational numbness.
Still. There was mostly pain. Denial. Anger.

He had made sure that everything would work; he had taken as many safety measures as he possibly could—his plan could not fail. Why did the one thing that was out of his control, but that he had thought to have proven to be unquestionably not a problem to him, just— why did that one tiny, inconsequential yet so impossibly important detail decide to backfire on him like this, just to spite him?

Why did she have to be the exception? What did he ever do to deserve this? Nothing he did could ever change what they did— whose fault was this? It certainly wasn’t his. And if this failure wasn’t because of him, then it just—

What was even the point. Even from here, the players were still playing with him, with no consequences. The only one who would suffer from consequences— needed not to, lest something even worse and irrevocable happen to the entirety of the Underground, something that could not be turned back even if everything else did.

He had started to mutter things, like a mantra, as if saying these nonsensical words could change his fate. Impossible, he would whisper in a trembling voice, shaking his skull from right to left and left to right as if claiming it could make it indeed as impossible as he wished it to be, and erase this event from reality. I can’t do this, he would say. Not again, he would repeat under his breath.

Ironically, as he knew full well but dared not consider truly, “Not again” was not even the beginning of the description of what the nightmare to come was going to be like.

With a second human in the equation. With a human that needed not to die, but who could not fight and whose injuries would be permanent. Everything could spiral down to truly eternal hell in a matter of minutes, at every given moment, with eternal consequences.

Looking after his own life and sanity was hard enough.
Now, looking after somebody else at the same time? No.

It was going to be different. It was going to be the same. It was going to be worse. So, so much worse.

He could not do it. Not again. Not like this. Not…

A shriek brutally yanked him out of his thoughts and back into reality— the first rational thought
that traversed his soul was that given its intensity, it was not the first one, and that he had been too absorbed in his mind to hear the first ones.

The second rational thought came when he opened his eye-sockets.


The sight alone was too much to bear. Not again. There was no gold, no red, but he could see them nonetheless. This was too much for reason. What even is reason for, if not for making you suffer even more.

It had just started, and he already failed.

From her location inside the Extractor, uneasily and clichédly wired to multiple bits of machinery and screens with lots of strings and small electrodes on her head and chest, Dawn could not see much, and only guess what the results would be by judging Alphys and Sans’s reactions, at least until they came to her and gave her their own explanations once the experiment would be over.

The experiment in itself was not as scary as it looked like. The goat skull shape was still intriguing and she had trouble understanding its purpose, but she could only imagine that it certainly had one; and that thankfully, that purpose was not to eat her alive or anything as stupid as that. The test was meant to measure how much determination her soul had, or something like that, so she had expected her soul to be involved; and indeed, soon after the machine was turned on, that big cyan heart started glowing and feeling as fuzzy and weird as usual. But, at least, there was nothing such as pain or discomfort other than what she was slowly getting used to with all these monsters showing her soul around every now and then. Compared to all the mad scientist tropes that could have applied here, she was quickly reassured to meet none of them. All in all, the “experiment” had truly felt like it was meant to be nothing but a regular medical checkup, in some way.

She waited patiently, looking from afar at the monsters and trying to decipher what they could be seeing. She felt anxious, but she wanted to feel as confident as they were that things would be fine. She hoped that they would turn out to be right about this, and her wrong. After all, if she had not been responsible for this Reset, then who was?

For minutes, there was nothing but silence. And then, slowly… Sans started to gradually lose it.

She knew what this meant, but all at the same time, her brain did not immediately make the connection—she refused to reach that obvious conclusion. Instead, she could only focus on one thing: Sans was losing it.
She tried to call out to him; Alphys did, too; it was as if he could not hear them, or as if they had ceased to exist to him; as if they did not matter anymore.

She tried to rush back towards them, so she could assist Alphys and more generally, try to help solve whatever was happening. Unfortunately, the wires and electrodes soon reminded her of her situation, and she found herself with no choice but to remove them one by one until she could move away. She had assumed that the experiment was over by then, so they wouldn’t mind, would they?

Her tedious unwrapping activity was cut short when, all of a sudden, everything got worse.

Thundering noises. Fleeting sparks of white. And then pain.

Alphys had taken cover, although she kept shouting as a persevering attempt to call out to Sans, begging him to get a hold of himself. Dawn desperately tried to do the same, but the wires maintained her in place; out in the open.

The bullets were too small, too incidental, to have any true shape. Most felt like tiny needles because of the speed— or maybe they were tiny, accidental deformed bones?

It burned when it hit, yet it was freezing.

It did not hurt too much, but it certainly felt painful, in a different, non-physical way.

She had no idea how this worked. She didn’t know if this was what was happening or if she was imagining it.

It was so cold. So lonely. It smelled like anger, and it felt like pain. It was simultaneously asking the questions and shooting the answers that it did not want to accept, but that it was starting to believe in nonetheless.

The desperation, the anger… They still felt repressed, as if despite the fact that they were exploding out in the open for all to see, they were still trying to contain themselves.

The anger was directed at various elements, accusing them yet defending them against those same accusations at the same time. There was fear, and an unexpectedly lingering, broken compassion. There was denial, and there was grief. There was hate, and there was hate against that hate.

Had she been screaming? She didn’t know. The only thing to be ascertained was that her cheeks felt two narrow, wet and warm trails. For a moment, all there was in the universe was a pair of black sockets looking back, and the painful sorrow those sockets had sent at her.

It was only when everything stopped that her body let her come back to her senses. The pain of
burn marks was processed and pressed itself in her brain, and as a response, survival instincts narrowed down the cause of the pain to its only possible source. The fear of a bunny facing flashing lights came in her eyes. The glance the skeleton had started giving her back an instant earlier gained horrified sparks of realization. Despite herself, an irrational, cold shiver ran down her spine.

The next moment, Sans was gone.

What… was this place? It looked familiar, but he had not seen these purple walls in such an insanely long time.

How did he arrive here? He had not put much conscious thought in his destination; he still wasn’t putting much conscious thought into anything, truth be told.

He collapsed on the ground. He did not know where he had landed in the Ruins, he did not know how he had been able to get past the supposedly impassable closed door, he had never considered the possibility that he could ever have the capability to find a way past it; but he did not care. For all he knew, he had landed not too far from where the player would go. Maybe he was on their path. Maybe the player would find him blocking their way by lying on the floor like this and just end him right here and now so they could continue their run undisturbed.

That would be peachy, wouldn’t it. It would be a fast way to skip this iteration and escape from all this mess.

Footsteps were coming. He wouldn’t have to wait for long.

There was a soundless, but still audible gasp of shock. That wasn’t the player. Oh well.

“Oh dear— are you quite alright?”

… No. No way.

That voice— that face… Was it really her?

He had not seen her in an eternity. When was the last time they had met face to face? He wouldn’t be surprised if that predated… the game, or whatever caused it to take over.

Too tired to care, yet too surprised to meet with an old friend he had not been able to see in so long and was supposed to have never met at all, he said her name.

Recollection and horror flashed in the old lady’s eyes, not needing any other sound from his voice to finally recognize the young adult monster laying on the floor.

“O-o-oh my God, are you okay?!”
Hardly a second after Sans’s disappearance, Alphys had jumped out of her hiding spot and rushed towards the human. She had made all these good resolutions, only to let everyone down as soon as things went sour? Good job, Alphys. Good job.

Thankfully, when she arrived to her level and examined the damage, the injuries weren’t as serious as she had feared. Those were some nasty burn marks, typically the kind that would appear only on humans’ bodies due to their inability to handle most monsters’ bullets regardless of intent; but at least there wasn’t any blood in sight, and the human was obviously still conscious and talking to her, albeit still in shock regarding what had occurred during the past minute. Needless to say, the first thing the lizard had to do was free her from the remaining wires and electrodes still attached to her; doing that seemed to pull Dawn out of her trance, as she immediately followed through and finished what she had started earlier.

Still, this simple task did not seem to distract her busy mind. Seeing the fear and confusion on the teenager’s face, the scientist soon felt compelled to explain:

“You, uh, you know how monsters express themselves through their m-magic, right? W-well it’s thankfully rare b-because it o-only happens when we’re under a very high am-mount of pressure, but…”

Dawn looked down, thinking about a certain invisible spot inside her chest. “S-sometimes bullets can appear even if you don’t want to…?”

“Something like that. He didn’t want to hurt anyone, I’m sure. It’s just that… When monsters are overwhelmed by very intense emotions, sometimes they just…”

Seeing as the yellow lizard was uneasily avoiding eye contact and prolonged her pause to an extent larger than usual, the human found herself finishing her sentence awkwardly, sending her a sad smile and a tense shrug. “… Snap?”

Alphys restrained a dire chuckle. “Y-yes, maybe a bit. O-or, a l-lot. I’ve never seen him so… crushed.”

The human’s eyes wandered away once more, fleeing in shame. She had seen Sans’s hopes ramping up, she had seen his confidence in his plan build and build and build, only seeing the first specks of weakness when everything spiraled down because of Asgore.

Well, you know what they say. The harder you fall.
When she thought about it, this wasn’t the first time that she was seeing a monster snap; back when she had met Alphys for the very first time, there had been this moment when she had let her frustration explode around them. There had been no bullets and no real threat back then, probably due to the fact that Alphys’s emotions were nowhere near as intense as what Sans just went through; but the sound of thunder, the invisible but ever present and ominous manifestation of thousands of sparks of conflicting emotions… They were proof that Alphys had, as she had said back then, “had a long day.” Nice euphemism for talking about your existential crisis upon meeting a “player” of the game you were supposed to be a part of.

Dawn took a deep breath, still trying to release the tension and adrenaline her fear had spread in her bloodstream. “Where did he go…?”

“I don’t know.” she shook her head dejectedly, looking down. “But… He’ll be back. He just needs some more time to… c-cool off somewhere he won’t hurt a-anyone else, I sup-pose.”

The human seemed willing to continue the conversation, but the lizard rushed away, before coming back with what looked like a smaller-than-usual first-aid kit.

Right. She was injured. It was almost funny how everything felt numb instead of painful… It might not be necessarily a good sign, though.

Alphys rummaged a lot through the small suitcase, often shaking her head discreetly but nervously, or muttering short words about how the various tools and bottles wouldn’t be of any use.

Well, this first-aid kit was certainly meant to deal with injured monsters instead of humans, so it was likely that most of this stuff wouldn’t be too relevant here. Figures.

“In the game, monster food can heal anything as long as it’s related to HP, I think. Shouldn’t that work?”

Alphys stopped dead in her tracks, dropping whatever she had in her claws at this time. She shuddered during a fleeting moment, reminiscing that, yes— this was all a game. This was why this human was here in the first place. This was why everything was so important and why Sans was so horrified to realize that they were stuck and why it was so terrible that his plan had failed.

Because now they were just as stuck as before and they had failed to regain what little freedom video game characters could ever dream to obtain.

If this was a video game, then… Didn’t it mean that they had no other purpose to their entire existence than to… entertain? To be disposable, respawned pawns?

“... R-right… Right. Here.”
Brushing aside these depressing thoughts, Alphys simply gave the human a small box of pills lying at the bottom of her first-aid kit.

“That usually helps a lot when monsters are hurt.” she explained, looking away. “I’m not sure it should be nearly as effective when it comes to healing a human body, but if you say that monster food a-acts like that…”

The teenager tried to interrupt her by thanking her with a warm smile, then with comforting words; but then again, what could she say? Hearing Alphys stutter this much was simply painful to watch; and although she could not read her mind, it was not difficult to guess—so much had happened in hardly an hour, and from her perspective, she had been dropped with all those memories she had forgotten, then been forced to reminisce all at once. It was easy to understand her pain… And it was hard to know what to do to relieve it. Surely she would only embarrass herself trying to help with random clichéd words.

Dawn took one pill immediately, just so she could have an excuse not to talk for at least the next couple of seconds. It was too bad that monster food naturally dissolved into thin air within exactly that amount of time.

She didn’t feel too much better afterwards, but then again, most of the pain had gone away as soon as Sans left. Maybe there just wasn’t any “magic curing effects” to be noticed in this specific case. She still felt a bit sore and the small but numerous burn marks on her skin did not disappear, though.

Oh well. It wasn’t like they had any better options.

“… I don’t have enough determination after all, do I?”

The only way she found to get back in action was to ask something obvious, but then again, she never did get any confirmation of that fact besides Sans’s meltdown.

Still, when Alphys looked down and shook her head slowly, there was no more doubt to be allowed; so they had to take this now established fact, and figure out what to do.

“Am I too far off? Maybe you’ve still got some of your vials left or wherever you’re stocking it, but…”
Alphys jumped three feet in the air, fidgeting in panic. “H-h-how do you know I—!?” Then she stopped. She pursed her lips, keeping a hand in the air that pointed nothing. She once more remembered what had been previously established regarding this one specific human teenager and her creepily extended knowledge. Then she buried her forehead in her hands and sighed. “N. Never mind. G-go on.”

Dawn bit her bottom lip, once more remembering too little too late to mind her tongue and words for the sake of everyone’s sanity. “S-sorry… I suppose giving me more determination one way or another isn’t an option…?”

If anything, these words only made the lizard tremble even more. “Y-you w-want…? I-I d-don’t know, I…” She closed her eyes and took a long, deep breath. “Y-you know what happened when I… Y-you know monsters can’t handle determination. Humans naturally have a lot more, but… For all we know, m-maybe humans have a limit too!”

“But I’m supposed to already have four times more than a human from here, right?”

“I-I know Sans said that, but even if it’s supposed to be the normal amount for a human like you, it’s not the normal amount for you specifically.” Alphys had started pacing around the controls of the Determination Extractor with haste and anxiousness, breathing faster and faster every second. “I-I-I hardly know anything about— T-this is too risky, I-I c-can’t allow that—”

Oh boy. “A-Alphys, it’s okay!”

Dawn’s first idea was to rush and hug the poor hyperventilating lizard, but just in case she could think she would be intruding her privacy, she decided to just walk (limp) to her and put a single hand on her shoulder. They exchanged a glance, and the human tried to show a small, reassuring smile. It wasn’t really genuine due to the sparks of disappointment she was trying to hide, but her intent was still to give Alphys the comfort she desperately needed. She had done so much for them already, after all.

“Fine. We won’t take that option.” Yet, at least. “I had another idea anyway.”

The scientist blinked in shock and with a heartening spark of hope. “Y-you do?”

Seeing how almost all of her tremors and fear disappeared in a flash, it was easy to realize how relieved she was that injections of dubious products were not their only option. Understanding that and being secretly relieved herself, Dawn nodded confidently.
“There’s been a Reset, and I didn’t do it.” the human reasoned out loud so the scientist could hear. “That can only mean that someone wanted to play and Reset their game, right?”

The dumbfounded lizard blinked in surprise, having strictly no idea how the game was supposed to truly work in the first place. “U-um. M-maybe?”

That sounded logical and intuitive enough, at least. It probably was how it was supposed to work.

Taking Alphys’s approval for granted, she continued: “We should confront them as soon as possible. I’m sure that as soon as we let them know what’s going on, they’ll want to help.”

The lizard’s confusion increased, this time with fear growing as well. “C-confront— wait—”

“Don’t worry, I know how the story goes, and I know what the players are supposed to do. I know that the game’s done a lot of harm, but I know that the players don’t really mean it and that they’ll stop if we let them know what’s going on.”

“W-wait, humans are danger— I-i m-mean obviously you’re one too, but…” Another deep breath. “It’s p-probably best if you could… at least find a strategy first?”

Dawn blinked, then showed a smile of amusement. “I already have a strategy. Step one, I talk to the player. Step two, they’ll be so confused and freaked out, they’ll know we’re not kidding and that they’re not playing a regular video game. Now I just need help getting to the Ruins’ door before they get out so we can meet up before they cause too much trouble.”

Alphys immediately went in front, politely blocking the limping human’s way. “Ooooor, we could at least wait until you’re a-able to walk properly before you jump into certain death.”

“It’s not gonna be certain death, we’ll just talk.”

“Please just let me disagree on this.” the lizard deadpanned. “I don’t know how the game works, but if it can k-kill, then how do you know the game won’t just take you for another enemy or something? Maybe the game won’t let you talk!”
Dawn wanted to argue; but, soon her mouth closed as she considered the option. Even in battle, the encounters were allowed to talk; but it did not change the fact that the player was the one to make the choices. The safest way was to prevent the encounter from occurring in the first place, but how could she ensure that it would happen that way? She wanted to believe that if the player were given the option to kill or spare her, after hearing her speech about obliterating the fourth wall and Undertale being real, they would happen to be a normal, sane human being and not an actual serial killer in real life.

But… would she be convincing enough? Undertale was known for breaking the fourth wall in a multitude of ways right from the beginning. What would be the more believable solution between the game being real, or her sudden appearance being an extremely rare event of some kind? Not to mention the fact that the game had been patched just a month earlier and that some data miners were still looking for minor changes in the game…

“Look— I’ll send Sans a text to let him know and he’ll come as soon as he can.” Alphys eventually offered, raising her cell phone for emphasis. “Let’s wait for him first. Okay?”

The teenager sighed dejectedly, but she had to agree.

Yeah. Maybe they needed to think things through a bit more than she had anticipated.

She wanted to be patient; this was what made her agree so easily as soon as Alphys gave her the option to wait. But… Could they really afford to be patient in this moment?

“Please do not take this the wrong way. I am overjoyed to finally meet you face to face, but… How exactly were you able to make your way past the door?”

There was an absent-minded shrug. “not really sure. i wasn’t thinkin straight when that happened.”

His answer was surprisingly genuine. You would expect an outsider found lying on the ground, wearing pajamas, on the wrong side of the Ruins’ door, to have at least one big skeleton in his closet, so to speak. But at least, this one answer did definitely not sound like a lie.

Sans sighed, looking down at the teacup in his hands. Just some time ago, he was drinking tea with Gerson; but all at the same time, that never happened.

It was always so disorienting to have fresh memories of eating, while your body actually hadn’t taken anything since the “previous day.” Everything he had eaten was during the past timeline; right now, hunger was becoming more and more striking. Whether Toriel had noticed or not, she had been quick to offer him the first thing she had on hand. Chocolate was a relatively good choice, and she had some monster candy at the ready.
In the corner of the table was a basket full of groceries. The smell of cinnamon could barely escape from it, trapped within a prison from which, for once, it would not be taken out of for at least a few more hours...

Looks like there won’t be pie this time. It would take too long to prepare.

He hesitated, but soon he spoke. “my turn to ask. a human fell down a bit earlier, right?”

Toriel’s face was contorted in shock.

“I… I asked them to wait further down the Ruins until I return. Although I have a feeling that they…”

“They won’t listen.”

The former queen of the Underground closed her eyes, taking a deep breath.

“If I may ask… how can you possibly know so much?”

Another pained sigh. “i don’t know nearly as much as you think. i just… saw it all happen already. way too many times.”

For some strange reason, Toriel did not feel as surprised as she believed she should. What he was referring to was impossible; and yet, somehow… it felt true. Worse than this… She had suspected it herself; first upon seeing this new human child, and now… No more doubt was allowed.

“I feel foolish. I unleashed a child in these Ruins, without supervision… I believe in humans, yet somehow, I am unsure which side I should be most worried about in this specific case.”

The skeleton remained silent. He gave a single lazy nod, just to show that he was listening, but… He already knew where this conversation was going.

“Strangest of all… I have this feeling. Do you know what I am talking about…? This feeling when you have a routine, and… It just feels comforting to follow it, because it is less frightening than
diving into the unknown? Ever since this child arrived, I have felt… compelled to follow a routine. It should be the first time, and yet… It is all so familiar. Too familiar.”

The former queen of the Underground did not receive any answer to this, once more. Yet, anyone could tell that he knew something about this phenomenon.

Her look became stern; or at least, it attempted to. She found it hard to show coldness in her expression, as if she already knew how much pain her friend from beyond the door was feeling; as he had for a very long time.

She closed her eyes for a short moment.

“Sans. I have known your voice for three years, without ever learning your name until just a dozen minutes ago. And yet… I have this nagging feeling that we met before; face to face, that is. It may even have been more than just one time.”

“it has.”

Sans found himself clenching his teeth, realizing too little too late that he had actually said these two words out loud.

A look of intense pain and concern washed over the boss monster’s muzzle.

“How many times, if I may ask…?”

He looked away, sighing. They all asked that one damned question, and he always only had one answer to give them.

“i lost track a long time ago.”

He wanted to stop there, but…

“i thought it’d be over. i’d done everything i could to make it stop. everything had worked up until this point. i really, honestly thought…”

The end of his sentence was replaced with broken laughter. It did not last long, but even after it
stopped, the smile of disbelief remained on his skull.

“but i failed. the cycle’s gonna start again and there’s nothing i can do to stop it. that was my last resort. the only plan i had left.”

Toriel carefully weighted her words for almost half a minute, choosing the softest tone she could afford.

“I apologize in advance for stating the obvious. You already considered asking for help earlier than now, I presume…” she suggested shyly and compassionately.

“pretty sure i asked everyone on the other side of the door at least once. might be wrong ‘cause it was a while ago… but i think i really tried to be as thorough as possible.”

He had said this with a relatively neutral tone, willing to answer honestly and precisely to the question; yet, he quickly found himself tightening the grip on his teacup.

“but they… they can’t remember anything. the only reason you can trigger déjà-vu around me is because we’re supposed to have never met yet. the others… they know me too much already. they already know everything, before i come to tell them anything. and yet they know nothing.”

The old lady remained silent, looking down helplessly.

“Isn’t there anything I can do…?”

“nah. ‘fraid there isn’t.”

Another heavy breath.

“This child I found this morning. They… they present a true danger, do they not?” she insisted guiltily. “Yet, I still feel… happy thoughts upon seeing them. They used to be different.” They used to be alive.

The skeleton remained silent for much longer than he would have preferred. There was no possible
answer that would feel natural.

He looked down and to the side, averting her eyes.

“… i can’t ask you to hold them off. they’ll kill you.”

Toriel’s head hung slowly, subtly bouncing up and down, certainly without her realizing it. Subconsciously, some part of her knew he was right. She knew that under more normal circumstances, she would have tried to prevent this child from leaving the Ruins, at least.

“Could there not be a way to simply talk to them…?”

The skull shook categorically. “just stay away from them. you don’t wanna know the rest.”

“What do you suggest, then?”

“stay away from them.” he replied instantly, gravely. “stay here. stay safe.”

There was a pause of rebuttal and quiet, childish denial. But soon, acceptance came. There was a docile, silent nod.

Sans started to wonder whether there were some things that he could do to prevent things from getting any worse. For a moment, he considered telling her about the human he had brought from another world, and how she was required to remain safe… Toriel would definitely take care of her the way she would with any other human child, and the teenager would certainly respect her new caretaker, keep her company, and hopefully, remain patient with her despite the Resets that would inevitably make her forget everything on a regular basis. But… Something was stopping him from doing so. Was it some lingering, naïve, stupid hope that maybe, just maybe, this human could still do something to solve their situation? Was it the fear of… loneliness?

He… He did not want to be alone again. He should not be thinking about this— this was foolish, this teenager wasn’t even that likeable at all to begin with, she had no idea how to defend herself, he wouldn’t be able to handle protecting himself and protecting a doofus like her all at the same time, but— he could not… Not again. He couldn’t do this all over again. Never. He would break. More than he already had…

He was falling back into yet another spiral of desperate and destructive thoughts, alone and afraid of a future that would never come and yet was already there all at the same time.
Thankfully… alone, he was not.

“You said that caring was the key to remembering events from past iterations, did you not?”

The old lady received a silent and tired nod as an answer. Despite her sadness and compassion upon seeing her friend’s despair, a warm and motherly smile grew on her muzzle, as she gently cupped the skeleton’s chin to lift his gaze back to her.

“Well, then. I can already tell that caring will also be the key to breaking this tragic cycle. I just know it.”

There was a weak chuckle. Caring… how? When nothing you did or said would ever matter, caring meant hurting. Why should anyone persevere when it was hopeless?

“You are lucky, Sans. There are so many friends and relatives around you. We all love you, Sans. We are all behind you. Please do not ever doubt this. Because we care… Your actions will always matter. We will come and help you.”

His actions… They really did not matter, no matter how many times a naïvely optimistic soul would say otherwise. The only reason anyone from his side of the Ruins’ door would remember anything through the time loops the way Alphys had during this specific iteration was because Dawn had been there to trigger something entirely new.

But then… maybe that was it? Maybe he could use her as some sort of catalyst to help everyone else remember…? Then again… Did he want anyone to remember anything? If the loops could still not be stopped despite everyone’s efforts at once, wouldn’t it be selfish to put everyone else through the same misery he was living…?

His train of thoughts was interrupted when a buzzing sound and sensation occurred. He lazily raised his cell phone and looked at his newly-received text:

[ FROM: Alphys — 10:01 AM ]
Hey Sans, hope ur doing better!! Ur free to come back whenever u want. Btw just so u know we’re on our way to Snowdin cos itll be easier for the rest. Meet u there whenever!!

Toriel could obviously not see what the message was about or who had sent this message, but this did not prevent her from chuckling warmly.
“See? They really are worried about you.”

The younger monster couldn’t help but chuckle back, weakly, but with a small spark of sincerity nonetheless. Before he could say anything, his phone vibrated once more, adding another precision to the lizard’s last message:

[ FROM: Alphys — 10:02 AM ]
Dawn says she has a plan.

“I believe this means it must be time for you to reunite with them, does it not?”

She was right. He felt somehow too overwhelmed to fully process what these messages were about, what this “plan” could be about, whether these girls were careless, or…

He found himself unable to think any further when he felt a pair of gigantic arms surround him softly and push him against a warm, motherly chest.

“Please come back if you ever feel like this again. I do not want you to be alone, understood? Remember that you are not. You have friends and family who care about you, even if they forget more trivial events.”

“… time loops ain’t really “trivial” stuff, toriel.”

“They are compared to the eternal fact that we love you.” she winked jokingly, but with a sincere, knowing smile. “This is what will triumph in the end. I just know it.”

He still had his doubts. He knew that these words of encouragement were closer to idealistic dreams than to realistic wisdom, and he knew that it would take a lot more than an old lady’s words for actions and consequences to significantly cement. He knew that he was too broken for these words to be enough.

Still… The fuzzy warmth of her embrace was just soothing enough to let him dream, for a few instants. For a second, he caught himself believing that maybe, just maybe… there just might be hope for healing. In a very, very long time, but… just maybe? Ironically, they literally had all the time in the world for a miracle like this to eventually occur in one specific, impossible iteration of the loop.

Between hope and despair, coldly rational certitude and fear of the unknown… An old, ancestral feeling that he had thought long forgotten, finally managed to emerge and flutter in the deepest core of his soul. He was loved; and he loved in return. He had friends who all worried about him,
certainly as much as he used to worry about them. As much as he was worrying for them in this very instant. Worrying…? Well, there was a more fitting word than this. As his old, lovely friend had put it… the word was caring.

He cared. They cared. *Everyone cared.*

In the end… Sans chose to whisper the only two words that could resume all of his thoughts and feelings at once.

“thank you.”

*Read via Screenshots Here (full formatting but may encounter loading issues)*

End Notes

I'm sure you see this a lot, but please please please comment if you enjoy your read! This fanfic is incredibly hard to write because of the amount of planning and the overall length of the chapters, and even though I'm mostly writing this story for my own amusement, I have even more ambitious projects out there that are just as demanding, if not more. It'd pain me as much as you if this story were to be left uncomplete, but unlike you, I personally don't need to work for months on a chapter to fantasize about the story. So... my personal motivation, sadly, is still very dependent on how much feedback this story is getting. If it feels like nobody is enjoying this story... the amount of work poured into each chapter feels kind of wasted, sadly. I hate to say this, but it seems that my inspiration is a little brat who refuses to work after a certain point if you don't give it its lollipop :(

If you're enjoying your read, if you have questions, or if there are some things you disagree with, don't hesitate to let me know! *There's also an independent tumblr blog all about this story's universe.* I love chats, so you can always come and say hi!

Additionally, you can check the side work *Learn When to Quit Writing Bonus Chapters*. This One-Shot collection of sorts is meant to be a way to further interact with you readers, as well as have fun giving you more content about this story's characters and whatnot. Most of what you see there is 100% canon.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!